WOMAN

HER POWER, INFLUENCE, AND MISSION

LENNARD

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HER POWER, INFLUENCE, AND MISSION

BY THE

REV. VIVIAN R. LENNARD, M.A.,

Rector of Lower Heyford (Oxon.).

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WOMAN

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HER POWER, INFLUENCE, AND MISSION

TWENTY-ONE SERMONS

ON

WOMAN'S MISSION; FEMININE CHARACTERISTICS; PARENTAL INFLUENCE; EDUCATION; ATTITUDE OF CHRIST TOWARDS CHILDREN; JEWISH HEROINES; ALSO AN ADDRESS IN COMMEMORATION OF HER MOST GRACIOUS MAJESTY QUEEN VICTORIA

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BY THE

REV. VIVIAN R. LENNARD, M.A.

Rector of Lower Heyford (Oxon.)

Author of "Passiontide and Easter," "Harvestide," etc.

WITH A PREFACE BY THE

COUNTESS OF JERSEY

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Frank

CONTENTS.

		PAGE
I.	WOMAN AS WIFE - -	1
II.	WOMAN AS MOTHER -	11
III.	WOMAN AS DAUGHTER -	19
IV.	WOMAN'S MISSION (IN THE HOME, THE CHURCH, THE WORLD)	30
V.	A PARENT'S PRAYER - -	51
VI.	FIRST STEPS - -	64
VII.	RELIGIOUS EDUCATION -	75
VIII.	CHRIST AND THE CHILDREN	88
IX.	THE DUTY OF INTERCESSION -	98
X.	S. MARY THE VIRGIN -	106
XI.	THE MOTHER OF THE LORD -	115
XII.	TWO BLESSINGS - -	123
XIII.	DEBORAH AND JAEL - -	135
XIV.	THE DISCIPLINE OF SORROW	144

		PAGE
XV.	AN IDYLL OF BETHLEHEM -	154
XVI.	A PURE FRIENDSHIP -	162
XVII.	MORAL AND SPIRITUAL GLEANINGS	170
XVIII.	PRAYER AND SACRIFICE -	179
XIX.	AN IDEAL WORSHIPPER -	191
XX.	THE DELIVERANCE OF ESTHER	199
XXI.	THE POWER OF GOODNESS -	207

PREFACE.

THOUGH the author of a book mainly addressed to women desires a few words of preface from a woman, the following pages speak so clearly for themselves that any such introduction would appear almost superfluous.

The Rev. Vivian Lennard has a high conception of our mission in the world, and no daughter, sister, wife or mother can fail to have her horizon of duty widened, and her path enlightened, if she reads his counsels with an open mind. It is a relief to turn from the conflict of opinions as to the rights of woman to this calm and sympathetic statement of the powers and privileges which await her, should she choose to assume them.

There is no reason to think that the desire to do right is feebler to-day than in any bygone age, but the calls upon women are so multiplied, and the freedom accorded to them from their earliest years is so enlarged, that there is small cause for wonder if some become distracted by the multitude of counsellors, and others over-impatient of any control.

Unless a man deliberately fritters away his existence he is generally forced to adhere more or less closely to a certain career, and to concentrate his attention, with greater or less ability, on a given round of duties.

The lives of many well-meaning women, on the other hand, become necessarily full of small occupations which render concentration difficult, and any such help to ordered thought as is here offered should be surely welcome.

In these addresses women will find no attempt to minimise either their opportunities or their difficulties, but examples drawn from the past, thoughtful consideration of the present, and an inspiriting outlook towards the future, may aid many to ponder more fully and soberly than heretofore the divine origin of their powers, and the noble purpose of their lives.

MIDDLETON PARK, *April*, 1910. M. E. JERSEY.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

THE present volume, in addition to two courses of sermons on Woman's Influence and Mission, consists of several discourses on the duties of parents and the education of children. To these are added two addresses on the Mother of our Lord; also some studies of saintly life and character, intended to mark that group of holy women (Heroines of the Old Testament), whose histories are brought before us in the Church's Lessons, before, or about, the Festival of the Visitation of S. Mary the Virgin.

Delivered at different times, either in London or the Provinces, some repetition of thought and phrase is inevitable. The author, however, prefers to leave the addresses as written, rather than to recast the whole, in order to present them in the form of a continuous treatise.

He takes this opportunity of expressing his indebtedness to all from whom he may have quoted, consciously or unconsciously, and of adding his grateful acknowledgments to the

Countess of Jersey, for her kindness in consenting, amid the many claims made upon her time and attention, to write a Preface to the volume.

In offering this appeal to his countrywomen on the divine side of their influence and mission, the author has ventured to include an address, delivered at a commemorative service, held on the day and hour of the interment of our late beloved Sovereign, Queen Victoria. This humble tribute to the goodness of a noble woman is offered in the sincere hope that her memory may long be retained, and her great example continue to influence the lives, and be enshrined in the hearts, of a devoted and loyal people.

V. R. L.

I.

Woman as Wife.

1 PETER iii. 1 (R.V.)

"That they may be gained by the manner of life of their wives."

THE pulpit, unlike the Bible, which it ought to expound, seldom addresses itself to women. Yet women form a very decided majority at our religious services. And no one, who thinks at all seriously upon the subject, can be ignorant of the wide and powerful influence exerted by them, not only upon the manners of the age, but also upon its morals and beliefs. The superlative importance of the subject will, I trust, be a sufficient apology for the following addresses; of which the first three are devoted more exclusively to the consideration of woman's influence, as it is exerted through the agency of her complex nature, in the varied and comprehensive sphere of her manifold life.

That influence begins with our first years and

earliest associations, and is continued to the latest moments of our declining age. It has been said that the last word which escapes from the lips of the dying soldier, as he falls upon the field of battle, struck down by a mortal wound, is commonly the first word which he learned in infancy —the word "Mother."

It is difficult to say in which era of her life-long sway, Woman's influence is greatest; whether as maiden, wife or mother. Woman rocks the cradle of human destiny; she instils into youth the principles which contribute to success or failure in after life. In no department of human education is her influence unfelt. It greatly adds to the beauty of the story of Queen Esther that she wrought her deliverance at the Persian Court, and secured the safety of her own people (the captive Jews), in an age and country where woman's influence was greatly restricted. Woman cannot be hidden and suppressed; her presence will make itself felt. Her influence can never be inoperative; it will affect matters of national importance and world-wide interest. I do not hesitate to assert that in every age or nation where Woman is exerting a passively feeble, or actively evil influence, that age or nation will prove sickly or demoralized, as the case may be.

Look at Woman's influence as it is unfolded

in Holy Scripture : first in the transgression, and first among the means ordained for its removal. "The seed of the woman," so the promise runs, "shall bruise the serpent's head." In the history of Israel in Egypt, to quote from an able writer, "When the *men* of Israel bowed in helplessness before Pharaoh, two women spurned his edicts and refused his behests. A father made no effort to save the infant Moses, but a mother's care hid him while concealment was possible, and a sister watched over his preservation when exposed on the river's brink. To Woman was entrusted the charge of providing for the perils and wants of the wilderness, and in the hour of triumph Woman's voice was loudest in the acclaim of joy that ascended to heaven from an emancipated nation."

Observe how largely David's life was influenced by the other sex ; his early ambitions drawn out by his love for Michal, the daughter of Saul ; the spirit of revenge restrained by Abigail, the wife of Nabal ; his policy in later years swayed by the clever and subtle mind of Bathsheba, the "granddaughter of Ahitophel."[1] We never read of David's brothers, but only of the sons of Zeruiah, his sister. And if we cannot forget that David was led to commit murder through his unlawful passion for a woman, it is refreshing to remember

[1] Blunt, "Undesigned Coincidences."

that he was also kept from this same hideous sin through feminine influence.

But, confining our thoughts to one department of this influence, let me speak of woman's mission as wife and matron in the natural sphere of her own home. S. Peter tells us that unbelieving husbands may be won to Christ "by the manner of life of their wives." Surely there can be no higher influence than this.

How beautiful a thought is that of husband and wife, led by some unforeseen circumstance, meeting, as we should say, "by accident," but in reality by the good Providence of God; drawn together by kindred tastes and mutual affection; fitted and prepared, one for the other, like the companion stones in the first Temple; hewn from a different block, carved by different workmen at different times, but shaped each to each, grooved and cut so as to bind together into one figure, one headstone, or one arch, in the living Temple of Christ. Such is marriage, when it fulfils its Divine intention. We all acknowledge the beauty of such a marriage, but how few, alas, combine to fill up that fair picture, except in rough outline! Is it not because we fail to keep our eyes fixed on the lofty standard set before us? We think of the young wife leaving the house of her parentage, amid the tears and fond farewells of loving hearts, to share the rough trials of life with one whom she has taken "for better, for

worse, for richer, for poorer," till death severs the knot which love has tied, and parts them for a little while. We think of her handed over to her husband's care, as Eve was brought unto Adam, to be henceforth *one* in heart, and sympathy, and faith; replying to the solemn questions at the Altar, as Rebecca replied to the question of Laban, her brother, when affianced to Isaac, her cousin, "'Wilt thou go with this man?' and she said, 'I will go.'"

Consider, then, the influence of Woman, as *wife*, in her own home. She has now reached, as I believe, the highest position of independence assigned her in the purpose of Almighty God, for woman was not made to act alone. Her influence is most powerful when exerted through others. Her appointed mission and destiny is to be the companion and helpmate of her husband, the bosom on which he pillows his cares, his sympathiser in adversity, his solace in affliction, his stay and comfort in every time of need. In the fulfilment of this ideal, she will prove like the sacred Ark, which rested in the house of Obed-Edom, the Gittite, a present and abiding blessing in his home.

Honestly, I believe this to be Woman's highest mission, not because she is inferior to man, but because her chief strength lies in her influence over men. From their greater strength and endurance, men naturally contribute more force

and executive power to the work of the world than do women. But individual men, by hundreds and thousands, are flagging in their work for lack of sympathy and encouragement. Their efforts are misdirected; they work foolishly, intermittently, where they might work steadily and hopefully, for lack of that sympathy and those sentiments which none on earth can supply as women can. What multitudes of men, in every grade and rank of life, work mechanically, even where they work industriously, without the solace of moral and religious motives to cheer and sustain them in their labour! Is the curse of toil indeed so light that it needs no amelioration? Should men go forth to their daily labour, morning by morning, like so many shackled convicts to their tasks? Is not the drudgery of gaining a livelihood, to many, as the weary round of the treadmill? Well! Woman's nature has specially fitted her for lending to life's commonest duties something of poetry and romance. If she is herself sustained by religious principle and the love of Christ our Saviour, she will infuse into her home such an atmosphere of peace, of hope and cheerfulness, as cannot but infect all who come within the spell of her influence. God has given to her the power of inspiring men with enthusiasm, not only for the accomplishment of great and heroic deeds, but also for the performance of dull and

commonplace duties in the regular and cheerful discharge of that routine work, the very familiarity of which makes it oppressive.

Men need to warm their hearts at the fire of a woman's affection, and when she consents to damp out that fire, or turn its warmth and light to burn in unconsecrated channels, when she allows her sentiments to be wasted, or her mind secularized by frequent contact with the world, she forsakes her high calling, and, in effect, denies the God Who made and fitted her to act as the companion and helpmate of man.

How drear and terrible a picture of domestic wretchedness is presented when the wife is not exerting her influence, except as the hinderer and opposer of her husband! What desolation reigns in that home, where the very presence that should have filled his cup with happiness is as a deadly poison rankling in his veins, where the disconsolate bread-winner, dejected and oppressed with the cares and toils of the day, returns, only to meet with renewed worries and fresh discomforts at home! What bitter and vexing thoughts harrow his mind and chase one another in quick succession through his fevered brain, until they goad him to intemperance, or worse!

The Book of Proverbs is full of hideous portraits of such women as I have just described —women who bring a curse into the home, and

not a blessing—sad caricatures of what a wife should be—the foolish woman, the clamorous woman, the contentious woman, whose evil tongue is like the "continual dropping in a very rainy day," the idle and dissolute woman, going from house to house as a collector of news, a tale-bearer, picking up seeds of evil wherever she goes, and carrying them from place to place (as birds propagate weeds in your garden), leaving them to grow and rankle in her neighbour's bosom.

Think what an extravagant wife may do, to squander a man's income and bring him to the verge of ruin, or think what a careful and thrifty wife may do, to save and economise, and make his slender earnings go their furthest.

I have spoken of Woman exerting a moral influence in the home. But there is one department of her influence which is included in this, which deserves special mention, I mean *gentleness*. Her power of sweetening human life by her warm affections, her womanly pity, and her tender heart. Human nature would be incomplete without Woman. Some of the best and noblest characteristics of the race are seen to perfection only in the gentler sex. Neither sex, indeed, represents humanity alone. Each needs the other, to fill in and complete the true ideal of human nature. Kindness is especially a feminine characteristic. It is Woman's department. "In her tongue," says King Lemuel, "is the law of kindness."

Here is her true sceptre and kingdom, the secret of her universal rule.

In this sad world of cruelty and crime the hearts of men are often steeled one against another by the fierce passions, and still fiercer competitions, of their sex and calling. The struggle to live seems almost to preclude consideration for others. Men have not the time, even when they have the inclination, to think as they should for their neighbours. But where men fail, Woman's tenderer nature comes in, enabling her to dispense kindness both within and without her home.

It has been suggested, perhaps fancifully, that the ineffable tenderness of Jesus was due to the strain of feminine sweetness inherited from His human Mother; that just as the Jew felt he could claim special kinship with Christ, Who was yet truly man and related to all men, so the gentler sex may feel that they have a closer bond of union with the Saviour than men have, through the fact that Jesus had but *one* human parent, and that parent a Woman.

But whether we admit this or not, few will deny that it is the especial province of Woman to show forth the gentleness of Christ in her temper, her words, her deeds; to light, from heart to heart the torch of love; to shed around the path of her home-life a halo of cheerfulness and kindly thought; to let her pure lips, which never breathed

a curse, part only and everywhere in blessing, that so she may exercise that rule against which there is no revolt and no appeal—the rule of gentleness and love, thus proving to the world her right and title to the saying: "In her tongue is the law of kindness."

II.

Woman as Mother.

2 KINGS iv. 26.

"Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child?"

HERE is a sermon on Woman's influence as Mother in the home. In this last and tenderest relation, the text addresses her in every clause, while it asks, "Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child?"

Now with respect to Woman's influence over men, delicacy forbids that we should speak with freedom, but as regards her influence over children there is no such restraint. Here we have firm ground to tread upon. What weighty responsibilities and tender joys are wrapped up in that word "Mother"! In the words of a great French preacher,[1] "The first years of a child's life belong to the mother, and they are the years in which is formed the predominant bias, which is often

[1] Adolphe Monod, "Woman, Her Mission."

destined to shape and rule its whole after life." You know the closing chapter of the Book of Proverbs, those exquisite verses which describe the model woman, the pattern wife? Everyone is familiar with the rich, glowing utterances ascribed to King Lemuel. They deserve to be written in letters of gold: those thirty-one verses, —a verse for each day of the month—a very almanac of instruction for young men and women. Has it ever occurred to you to ask from whom this charming poem emanated—these inspired verses, so full of chaste sentiment and practical wisdom? Assuming Lemuel to be a real person, and the introduction to the poem to be a real statement of fact, we learn that in these verses you have embodied the recollections of childhood, stored up and given to the world years afterwards: "The words his mother taught him." Never read that chapter without thinking, here are the memories of a pious mother's words to her son, springing up and bearing fruit in after years. Even a king did not think himself demeaned by chronicling for the use of his subjects the advice his mother gave him when a boy.

It goes without saying that the lessons which sink the deepest, and make the most impression, are those learned at a mother's knee. She has the child's earliest confidences. To her its first difficulties are taken. An infant, if its home training is worthy of the name, needs no remind-

ing "to carry them to its mother." To her its little heart is ever open, and her loving caresses are the cure of all its cares.

The Jesuit Fathers used to put the wisest and most gifted of their order to teach the infant classes in their schools. In the same way, God has chosen those who are mothers, and placed them in the world to be the teachers of His infant class. Jacob had a mother who taught him to lie, and through his filial attachment to his mother, Rebecca succeeded in lowering her son while she sought to raise him. Is it not all that the best offices of Ambition usually do for us? At any rate, it was what Rebecca's influence effected. Under her tuition Jacob grew up a master of duplicity. Cunning and unscrupulous, he came forth from his mother's hands, the crafty supplanter of his generous brother, and the despicable cheat of his affectionate old father. The influence of his home training had led Jacob to become in every respect a hard, grasping, cruel man. His was a most unenviable nature. Can we say that he inherited it from his father Isaac, or his grandfather Abraham? Was it not rather the result of an ambitious mother's worldly policy and training?

The Bible is full of warnings and encouragements to mothers. The worst kings of Judah and Israel were those that had wicked mothers. The noblest reformers owed their inspirations to

these natural guardians of their youth. Samuel, John the Baptist, Timothy, S. John, had all good mothers, who brought them up in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord." Our Saviour's first miracle at Cana of Galilee was suggested and drawn out by His Mother's womanly solicitude and ready obedience, while a charge concerning His Mother was one of the seven last words from the Cross.

"Maternity is a ministry,"[1] and God surely intended us to realise the tender and sacred responsibilities which it includes. But do you always recognise that you are the guardians of your children's characters, as well as of their persons? That this was implied and expected of you when you became mothers? That Christ looks to you *first*, before the school-teacher, before the clergyman, to fulfil this ministry on behalf of your children? You make diligent and painstaking efforts, and exercise the most stringent self-denial, in order to clothe and educate them, but in all this thoughtful care for your offspring, are you equally anxious that they should grow up virtuous and good? Do you intercede for them, as Salome did for her two sons? Do you take them to Christ in prayer? or are you satisfied merely to have them baptised and confirmed, and leave the rest to clergymen and teachers to accomplish? Above all, do you seek to set them

[1] Adolphe Monod, "Woman, Her Mission."

a good example, or will they, as soon as they are grown up, immediately forsake all religious duties, in imitation of what their mother *does*, not in obedience to what she *says?* Never forget that the important thing is *character*, not appearance.

It is a ghastly thought that the child whom you have striven to send out so neatly and beautifully dressed, may have an ugly soul, and you have taken no pains to avoid it, have never really thought about that; yet beneath the dress, the clean face, the healthy body (all important things), is the most important of all—the child itself. "Is it well with the child?"

And remember, the question does not stand alone. It is coupled with another—"Is it well with thy husband?" It is the general home influence which tells. We speak of the "family circle." It should be a circle, joined in love, and bonded in faith and righteousness. For influence, like an electric current, cannot operate freely and efficiently unless the circle is complete. It must be well with thyself, with thy husband, with the child. Not that any mother can ensure such a result. With the best and most laudable endeavours it may be unattainable. Such, however, is the ideal of home influence, at which we should aim, and we should never be satisfied with a lower.

Now we know that this family union of which I have spoken must one day be dissolved by

death. That is inevitable. The breach caused by death, however, may be healed, and the family, divided on earth, be re-united in heaven. It is otherwise if the breach is caused by sin. For the home circle may be divided and broken up not only by death, but by sin. Indeed, the separations caused by sin are as real, as lasting, and as terrible, as those caused by that grim shadow that comes between us and our loved ones, to snatch away now one, now another, and sever the bonds which nature and affection have tied. For example, a son goes wrong, takes to drinking habits, and forthwith becomes idle and dissipated. He leaves home in disgrace, and is perhaps unheard of for years. Or a daughter disgraces her parents, and brings shame upon their good name. The home which has nurtured and fondled her in infancy receives her now in sorrow. But the blow which her sin has struck at its joy and peace is crushing in its consequences. It is a cruel separation. Her parents age rapidly; the father's form becomes bent, and his step less elastic than formerly, while there is a dull pain at the mother's heart ever after, which knows no cessation. Such are the separations of sin. And even where they are less serious and apparent, they still enter as elements of discord and division. It is this, then, that we need to fear most, as being most apt to mar family life. For sin is more to be dreaded than disease. It

is more awful than death. If we would retain the family circle in health and peace and honour, then we must beware of the encroachments of sin. People complain sometimes of the unhealthiness of their houses. They lie in the valley, they are damp or insanitary, in consequence of which their inmates are never well. It is so with the moral conditions of some homes. The atmosphere is bad. There is no religious influence to check the miasma of sin. If it is to be well with the household you must get out of the low, misty flats of selfishness and discontent, and live on a higher level of faith and hope, where religion is the common atmosphere, which all can breathe and enjoy.

One word of appeal. Regarding the text as addressing itself to Woman in the sphere of her home life, and as referring to her moral influence over others, let me ask once again, "Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child?" These three questions follow in the natural order of religious sequence and moral infection. For there is an infection of health, of cheerfulness, of goodness, as well as of disease or sinfulness. Our influence is very properly referred back to our inherent capacity for exerting it. The question is put first to ourselves: "Is it well with *thee?*" All centres here. Our enthusiasm, our consistency, our power for influencing others—all is dependent upon the

depth and reality of our own spiritual appropriations. A flower can only diffuse its own sweetness. A fire can only give out heat in proportion to the amount of its combustion. It is so with ourselves. We must *be*, and then *do*. Let us, then, seek afresh the purifying grace of God. Let us, in the words of the old collect, ask Him to "increase in us true religion"; to "nourish us with all goodness"; to plant and nurture in our hearts the seeds of piety and true godliness; that so, bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit, we may be diffusive of a high moral influence, both in our lives and conduct. That when we are asked by One Who has authority to interrogate our hearts and ways, the question which Gehazi asked the Shunammite as she ran to meet him—"Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child?"—we may be prepared with the Shunammite's answer, while we reply in fervent thankfulness, and yet in deep humility, "It *is* well." All is *well*.

III.

Woman as Daughter.

JEREMIAH xvi. 3.
"Thus saith the Lord concerning daughters."

THE Bible has a message for us all. Not only to men and women individually, with regard to their personal responsibilities before God, but very often it addresses us as a class, and says something with respect to the position we occupy in life, and the duties which we owe in that position, one to another. Thus, S. Peter addresses wives, husbands, slaves. S. Paul does the same, and adds, also, some advice to masters and children. He exhorts young men and young women. And here, in the verse before us, we find the prophet Jeremiah delivering a message from Jehovah to each department in the family; to mothers, fathers, sons, daughters.

Following his example, may I offer some advice to young women, more especially to those who are still living at home? For though your

influence is not confined to the family circle, yet, if you would really know and estimate it correctly, you should find out what it is *there*.

And here let me say that your influence should be chiefly that of contagion. It is your part to minister, rather than to instruct. Yours is not the office of a teacher. It is not your advice that will be sought, but your help and co-operation. The days for a more decisive and assured authority will come soon enough, for they are heavily weighted with responsibility. Your own days are sufficiently full-handed for your years and attainments. Never forget that in the fulfilment of the humblest offices, and the performance of the most trifling services, you may be valued and loved. It is not the importance of each separate act which makes the sum total of our life a thing of so much consequence, but the spirit and temper in which we set to work, the earnestness or the negligence, which characterizes our performance of those ordinary duties which lie immediately beneath our hand.

Our Blessed Lord has so sanctified the most ordinary gifts, and employed them for great and holy ends, that He has taught us how even a touch or a word may be put to a noble and sacred use, and made instrumental to the happiness and welfare of others. Thus, in imitation of Him, we may fairly speak of the ministry of the eye, the ministry of the hand, the ministry of the heart:

When Christ looked forth from the Hall of Judgment, and His eye rested upon poor shame-stricken Peter; when He looked up from His position over against the Treasury, and noted the widow's tiny offering; when He looked around upon those who had desecrated the Temple; He was exercising the ministry of the eye.

Again, when He stretched forth His hand and touched the outcast leper, regardless of his loathsome disease; or caught the timid and faithless apostle as he sank beneath the threatening waves; when He anointed the eyes of the blind, and touched the tongue of the dumb, or took the five barley loaves and blessed and brake them (distributing them to the disciples); He was then exercising the ministry of the hand.

These are parables in large and easy type for young readers, to study and imitate. For it is through the ministry of lowly acts and gentle deeds, that you will best make your presence felt and valued. By kind looks, a sweet voice, a patient temper, a bright and joyous nature, you may infuse happiness into the lives of others, and make your home glad with your presence and sympathy.

Much may be done in this way to soften or silence family discords, to diminish the cares of your parents, and brighten the lot of the little ones. Here is an office which angels might

emulate, yet many despise it and think it beneath them.

Or take the ministry of the hand. We talk of the wonderful power of a conjurer's hand, or of the facile fingers of some celebrated pianist, but there is also a moral sleight of hand, equally wonderful, and much more useful, by which we may assist, with no obtrusive busy-ness, wherever assistance is most needed. Do we not all know something of that dexterity of usefulness which is more wonderful even than Art? Have we not seen and marvelled sometimes, at the work which one pair of hands can accomplish in a busy household, in the way of patient, dexterous toil? How much may be done by a deft sempstress, or by a good economist, to lessen the cares and diminish the expenses of a middle-class home.

But there is not only the ministry of the eye, and of the hand, but also the ministry of the heart. For it is in and through her affections, that woman exerts her most potent sway. I have spoken elsewhere of the evil influence exercised by Jacob's mother over her son. Under it the Patriarch grew up a cold, hard, grasping, and selfish man. By the good Providence of God, however, the evil which his mother had infused into Jacob's character, he was enabled, eventually, to overcome through the influence of his wife. For Jacob's wife taught him to love,

and that love softened the hard man more than any other single influence of his life. The prayer of Penuel was pre-eminently a prayer for Rachel, the conquest of Penuel a victory for Rachel, and the remarkable part of Rachel's influence was that it actually deepened Jacob's piety. Though it was a purely natural influence, for we have no evidence to lead us to infer that Rachel herself was at all remarkable for religious feeling (on the contrary, we suspect that she was a somewhat selfish, though perhaps affectionate and beautiful woman); yet she won Jacob's heart, and it was the softening influence of this merely human affection which, under God, did so much to make Jacob a better man. It tapped the deeper nature, it melted the large heart, and drew forth the vast capabilities and strong affections which lay hidden beneath the icy coldness of that reserved and self-contained spirit. Rachel did not teach Jacob religion, but she taught him to love, and his religion assimilated the love and made it religious.

I have spoken of the power of affection, and of natural influence, where it is exercised in purity and kindness, but a woman's influence must be religious if it is to reach its highest ideal. Now, there is no question that women are more devotional than men. They have commonly more taste for religious services, for singing hymns, for reading the Bible and good books.

The instinct of worship is stronger in them than in others. "O, woman! great is thy faith!" may be said of the sex, as well as of those who are individually devout. It was John Wesley who said he believed there would be more women in heaven than men, and many have felt and thought the same. But because women have this religious tendency, they need, perhaps all the more, to be on their guard lest their piety should stop short of active service, and their religion evaporate in the mere sentiment of devotion, without exerting any corresponding influence upon their lives. When the pious girl of the family is the least amiable and winning in her disposition and character, what can we say of the depth and reality of her principles? She may be scrupulously particular about her prayers, and her morning chapter, but if at the same time she is selfish and petulant, her friends will impute these unwomanly characteristics to her piety, and say that religion has soured her. The verdict may be shallow and unjust, but men, especially, require the recommendation of a winning and lovable character to woo them to religion. Husbands and brothers are not slow to note inconsistencies in your life, as departures from principle, and they count such moral gifts as amiability and unselfishness of more worth than any number of hours spent at church. It is the special province of female piety to recommend religion by its grace

and sweetness. That word "adorn," with reference to a holy life, is used in the New Testament almost exclusively of women. Men, by their words may defend the truth, but women will best adorn it.

And speaking of our influence and duty as Christians, I may say that there are two great principles of action which should animate our religious life. One is to be always extracting from the world something which we can employ for the church, so dedicating our knowledge, our talents, our money, our friendships, our influence to the service of Christ.

The other principle is the direct opposite of this. It is, to be always carrying away from the church something wherewith to enrich the world; a thought, an inspiration, an affection, a resolve—for use in our daily intercourse with mankind.

Following out the first principle, we should act as wise stewards of all secular influences, so making "friends of the mammon of unrighteousness." As merchants on a foreign shore, who trade with a strange, and perhaps a savage or hostile race, we should seek to make the most of our opportunities while our ship remains in those distant seas, in order that we may have a full cargo on our return home. Thus, we should be always acquiring, and watching for occasions to turn our acquisitions to a religious use. This is to spoil the world, as the Israelitish women spoiled their

Egyptian sisters, for the use and service of the Tabernacle. For they employed their time in Egypt in acquiring arts which they afterwards found most valuable, in the construction of that movable Temple for national worship which God commanded Moses to erect in the desert, as being most suitable to the wants and habits of a nomadic race. Thus, not only in gold and silver and precious stones, but also in cultured tastes and divers arts of needlework, the Hebrew women spoiled the Egyptians, dedicating their acquisitions to the service of Almighty God. This is one way, and the principle is capable of indefinite extension into regions far beyond its literal application to matters of ecclesiastical decoration.

On the other hand, in illustration of the opposite principle, viz. that of carrying from the church something wherewith to enrich the world, we should constantly aim at doing something true and noble for Christ, by giving to our religious sentiments a thoroughly practical turn. Above all things, we should fear lest our best and noblest feelings should evaporate in mere poetry for want of being turned into a useful channel. Remember, our religion is worth nothing, except it spends itself in active service. As the student of Botany or Agriculture turns to his conservatory, or his farm, for practical proof of his knowledge and theories, so we should turn to the world for the actual working out of our religious convictions.

In this way we may carry from the altar, the prayer-desk, the lectern, or the pulpit, principles of action, a temper and spirit of devotion for use in our daily life, and in our varied intercourse with the world.

And speaking of Woman's influence outside her own home, how great is her responsibility, and to how high a destiny is she called, in the reformation of mankind, if only she will fulfil it. In what we call "Society" Woman is placed as the heart and centre. Like conscience in the soul, she is best fitted to be the moral indicator of right and wrong; forbidding, by her presence, whatever is coarse in sentiment, false in belief, or cruel in action? Like the sensitive plant in the botanical world, which shrinks from a touch, retiring from all contact with evil, hiding herself from the hard speeches and baser actions of men, expressing alike by look, and gesture, and deed, her inveterate and unconquerable abhorrence of what is wrong.

One department of her influence is conversation. We often hear "women's talk" sneered at, and yet they, and not the other sex, are the controllers of conversation in society. What women read and say fixes ultimately the standard of "the popular," both in subject and style. By their conversational gifts women have the power, if only they will use it, of raising the tone and elevating the tastes of those around them, especially in their intercourse with one another.

Again, another matter which falls more directly within the province of Woman's influence, is the general standard of living adopted in society, whether ostentatious or frugal, luxurious or the reverse. Women have more to do than men with the decision whether the age shall be grave and sober, or gay and dissipated; whether work or play shall claim the longer hours; whether our amusements shall be recreative or debilitating, and ourselves a thoughtful and industrious, or a frivolous and volatile people. In other words, whether our civilisation shall be true or false, our culture a mark of progress or decay.

In all these respects women cannot but play a prominent and influential part. As leaders of fashion, as the guardians of youth, as fixing for us the general standard of living, education, and culture, as the handmaidens, also, of piety, strengthening the inward structure of society by their elevating sentiments and persuasive goodness, women occupy a unique position, worthy of the loftiest ideals. Indeed, it would be difficult to assign to them a vocation which carried deeper responsibilities or gave greater scope for their powers.

At the same time, women must not expect to fulfil this lofty ideal of feminine duty in dependence only upon the natural characteristics of their sex. They should seek for these to be strengthened and purified by Christian faith and hope.

Let me, then, say to women, in whatever class, or station of life their lot is cast, "Dedicate your gifts and powers to Christ. Act in His strength and His spirit, and the world will bless you. Society will be the better alike for your womanly influence and Christian intercession. So shall you win for yourself that old, but inspired, eulogium, 'Favour is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates.'"

IV.

Woman's Mission.

1 TIMOTHY ii. 8-10.

"I will therefore . . . . that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, . . . not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works."

THE passage from which the text is taken implies a certain distinction and contrast between the sexes. It assumes a real, but subtle, difference in their natures and characteristics, which religion does not suppress or ignore, but fully recognises. For religion, while it raises woman, does nothing to unsex her. It does not contradict the ideal suggested and laid down at her creation, but everywhere fosters and upholds it. Thus, it is woman's highest glory to be feminine, and all that she does should be done naturally, through the attributes and characteristics of her sex. Religion does not contemn these, but only turns them into the highest channels. If, for example, it is natural

to woman to adorn herself, she is reminded that her noblest and truest adornment is that of the mind and heart, manifesting itself in her life even more than her person. Thus, "good works" *adorn* her. They are the natural and inevitable expression of her renewed nature. To use the apostle's own words, they "*become* women professing godliness." These "good works" will vary much with the age, and with our circumstances. They are capable of almost endless diversification in their adaptation to the times in which we live.

Speaking generally, there are three spheres of action in which we may think more particularly of Woman's mission, and of her employment of the principle laid down by the apostle. They are the Home, the Church, and the World. In each of the successive stages of Woman's existence, whether as maiden, wife or mother, she has distinct duties in connection with these. And an enlightened judgment, strengthened by prayer and a pure intention, will enable her to decide in which sphere, whether the Home, the Church, or the World, circumstances call her to devote herself most unreservedly.

As regards the Home, the ideal of the Creator was distinctly enunciated at the beginning. According to this ideal, woman was not intended to live alone. She was placed in this world as the helper and companion of man. Here is the basis

of her operation. And in the fulfilment of this ideal her influence has ever proved the strongest and most effective. For this she was created and sent into the world. Here is her natural and pre-ordained mission, for which she is pre-eminently fitted. In the pursuit of this ideal, the widest and most influential department of home duty is, without doubt, the sphere of the affections. Other departments, however important, are secondary and accessory to this. For where kindness and gentleness have their "perfect work," where sympathy and unselfish devotion hallow and soften by their magic touch, all the varied acts and duties of home life, *there* Woman's influence is greatest. Here we see, in its most beneficent and attractive form, this elemental but divine community, the little guild of the Home, which God Himself has formed and placed within the great guild of the Church. Woman's primary mission, then, is so to carry out this ideal as to manifest the saintly in the "simple life." And nothing can supersede this. No works of skill or gifts of intellect, no clever management or wise supervision, can supply the want of affection, or contribute the influence of that primary grace, which pours into the common cup of home duties and home joys the heavenly gift of Christian love.

But there are two sides to the home life—the social and the domestic. As I have tried to show, Woman's chief and tenderest duties are with

persons—the husband, children, servants, and all who are included within the home circle. These have a first claim. But there are also duties in connection with the home itself. The household needs care and supervision. The wife is also the housewife. In a poor man's home a woman's duties are chiefly domestic. In a middle-class home they should still occupy a considerable portion of her time. And though, in the upper ranks of life, such duties will naturally be more social in their character, yet it should not, I think, be lost sight of that, if unnecessary from an economic point of view, it is nevertheless an advantage to a woman herself to have an interest in domestic matters. It not only brings her into closer touch with the various members of her household, but even where a woman is literary, or a student, such duties form a great relaxation when once she has acquired a real and practical interest in them. Few things provide a more complete change for a woman than to spend a certain portion of each day in the management of her household affairs. Whatever her station in life, or however much the times may change with regard to the arrangement and conventions of home, I can never think that the domestic side of home life should be altogether excluded from Woman's mission.

Her deepest influence, however, will always be with *persons*, rather than *things*. For example,

think how the wife of a clergyman may keep up her husband's activity and usefulness in a parish, by lending him something of her cheerfulness and enthusiasm. By showing him the charm and romance which underlie even monotonous and commonplace duties, she will encourage him in the performance of regular and sustained efforts for the good of others, however dreary or hopeless they may appear. Her clearer insight, too, and tenderer sympathies for the suffering or the tempted, will often enable him to effect what, without her, he would strive in vain to accomplish.

And so throughout every grade of society, from the highest to the lowest. And remember, if woman will not do her part, God may, indeed, employ angels to do it for her, but that will be her loss. It is one of the saddest thoughts connected with forfeited responsibility, that even if the work itself be accomplished by other agencies, the opportunity for us has passed away, and our reward is forfeited. It is terrible when Woman's influence is not only inoperative, but actively evil, inimical alike to both religion and virtue. Look at the influence of Solomon's wives. We read that Solomon had many wives, "and it came to pass when he was old, that his wives turned away his heart." That is the history of a great fall. Both David and Solomon were tempted and led astray by a form of Eastern voluptuousness through

the influence of women. The temptation, however, assumed a somewhat different aspect in father and son. David's voluptuousness led to gross and violent departures from the laws of purity and virtue, but his sin was succeeded by a true repentance and a complete restoration to the love and favour of God. In Solomon, the evil is exhibited in a more subtle and respectable form, and yet, as is often the case, it was succeeded, so far as we can learn, by no such contrition and amendment as David's. At any rate, history is silent on the subject. The temptation, in David's case, was to a sin *against* marriage; in Solomon's case, to sin fostered *through* marriage. And is not Woman's influence, when once it becomes injurious or degrading, as potent in the one direction as the other? Her influence for evil is not restricted to ministering only to sins of passion; she may also, as in the case of Jezebel, minister to selfishness and ambition; or, as in that of Solomon's wives, to profanity, scepticism, and worldliness.

But passing on to our second point: Woman has also a mission in the Church. What careful student of the Old or New Testament could doubt it for a moment? "Did not a woman's faith hide the future deliverer, Moses, from Pharaoh's evil edict, and a woman's tenderness save him from a watery grave?" A woman's prayer gave Samuel to the Jewish Church, and a

woman's devotion fed Elijah during the awful straits of an Eastern famine. In Christian times holy women ministered of their substance to the Saviour Himself. Not a few of our Lord's miracles, and many of His choicest sayings, were elicited by feminine faith or fervour. Think of the Saviour's friendship with the devout sisters of Lazarus, and recall how that friendship formed the one earthly solace which sweetened His last days. In the times of the apostles we know that Timothy owed his early faith to the instructions of his mother Lois and his grandmother Eunice. Also, how the teaching of Priscilla and her husband fitted the eloquent Apollos for his future ministry as a preacher and expounder of the faith. At the first propagation of Christianity it is evident that women took a prominent and influential part, both for and against the new teaching. For, at Antioch in Pisidia, we read of the "devout and honourable women," who with the chief men of the city, were stirred up by the unbelieving Jews to raise a persecution against Barnabas and Paul. And, again, of "honourable women" amongst the Bereans, who believed. And all through the centuries (as in modern times), the influence of woman has been of incalculable importance in adding to the work and efficiency of the Church.

Much ridicule has been cast upon the various Christian agencies in which women are employed

in connection with the Church. The Guilds and Working Parties, the Dorcas Meetings, and gatherings for missionary, or other, purposes. These, I freely admit, are sometimes open to criticism from the way in which they are conducted. It is the *abuse*, however, and not the *use* of these agencies which lower them in the eyes of sober, thinking men. And when, as sometimes happens, they lead people to become more, instead of less exclusive in their intercourse with others; when they promote idle gossip, or, what is even worse, *unkind* gossip; when they lead young women who have plain and unmistakable duties at home, to neglect these for Church work, because it offers more novelty and excitement than they can extract from home calls; then, we can hardly speak too severely of that which, under the cloak of piety and religious zeal, cultivates idleness and a worldly spirit. But such abuses need not creep into parochial organizations. It augurs gross carelessness in the administration when they do. Besides, the possible abuse of a thing is no argument against the right use of it. And, under proper management and control, there ought to be in every town parish a number of organizations, in different hands, and with different people responsible for their working and success, which might be carried on under the auspices of Christian women; such as Bible Classes, and associations for girls, as well as Working Parties,

and other agencies, for the collection of money towards charitable or religious objects. These might be supplemented by District Visitors, Sunday School Teachers, a Parochial Librarian, Correspondents and Editors of a Parish Magazine, besides Lecturers on domestic and sanitary matters, to say nothing of persons who will provide useful and healthy entertainments for the benefit and amusement of the people.

But there are those whose health or circumstances prohibit active service. Must these, in consequence, be useless? Not at all. Those who cannot work can pray. Indeed, speaking generally, prayer is a department of religious influence more open to women than to men. They have usually more leisure, and are less frequently from home. They have, therefore, the greater call to be intercessors. For there are two main divisions in the life of every saint of God, viz., work and prayer. "Ora et labora" was the motto of the old monks. And it is remarkable that S. Paul puts these two branches of Christian duty upon exactly the same footing, where he speaks of "labouring in prayers." Prayer, then, is a form of work. Nay, it is the highest work of all. And those who are cut off from active service in the vineyard of souls, may still be exercising a potent influence in the church by their daily intercession. What a use might be made in this way of the daily services held in

your parish church, when husbands, fathers or brothers, are absent and busied with the affairs of this life, if you, who are at home and have the leisure, would meet together in church, or at the Altar of your Lord, as intercessors for the Church He died to save. Would such prayers, think you be wasted? Are they not rather the very life of the Christian community? Is not one reason why there are often so few at a week-day Communion because people do not recognise it is an opportunity for intercession? You have never regarded it, perhaps, in this practical light; or with respect to others, as being your special duty and privilege in God's Church below, to act as Christ's intercessors for those who are away battling with the world, and braving the temptations of it in their respective vocations in life. Yet so it is. For just as the Master Himself lingered on the Mount while the storm raged, and the disciples in their little boat were struggling in rowing against the tempestuous winds and waves, so you, in His name, and with His authority, may be exerting, unseen, a divine influence on behalf of those you love best on earth.

And here let me say, that while Woman's influence is by no means confined to her instrumentality in matters of religion, it is, nevertheless in alliance with the Church, and the ministry of our holy faith, that she reaches what is most

sublime, and wins that best of all commendations "She hath done what she could."

Once again, Woman has not only a mission in the home and the Church, but also in the world. It is an axiom in science that you cannot create a force. You may, however, adapt existing forces to the most varied uses, to which it may not have occurred to past generations to put them. It is so with moral forces. They are capable of almost endless adaptation to the wants of the times and the usages of society. And it is Woman's part, not only to direct her own influence into modern channels, but by her quicker perceptions and more impressionable nature, to show the other sex, also, how to exert *their* influence to the greatest advantage in their day and generation. Woman is peculiarly fitted to be a social reformer. It is a task which God has especially assigned to her. This she will accomplish, not by her own unaided strength and efforts, but as the pioneer and teacher of men, influencing by her tact, her enthusiasm, her versatility and address, the minds and morals of the age.

Society is Woman's kingdom. Here she reigns supreme. Her sway is undisputed, her dynasty unchanging. Only, let her use her influence in the name and strength of Him Who came to elevate human society, Whose mission it was to raise this poor, sinking world, and mould it into

a miniature heaven. Amid this strange cosmos of human thought and sentiment and feeling, which we call "Society," woman is placed as the heart and centre. We look to her as the source and custodian of its noblest sentiments, the seat of its most tender emotions.

Now, I ask, are women fulfilling this high ideal of the sex's vocation in relation to society? Do mothers and daughters in the upper and middle ranks of life exert their moral influence for the expurgation of evil from the community to which they belong? Alas! too frequently they lay down the sceptre and yield their authority, without even the pretence of a struggle. For they freely admit to their homes and friendship men whose characters are but too well-known in society, and whose aims call loudly for moral castigation; men who deserve to be scouted by all respectable people, whose lives are an open scandal, and whose very faces disease has branded with shame. Can women, who were intended to be the salt of society, be doing right to lavish upon such men their friendship or their smiles? This is a matter, remember, which women have in their own hands. They hold the key of the position. The laws of society are, for the most part, of their own forming. Such legislation is within their own control.

Again, women are the leaders of conversation, and decide very much what may, or may not, be said without infringing the canons of good taste

and feeling. They fix the scale of living in each class of society; they regulate our amusements; they decide, to an enormous extent, the books that shall be read, and so influence and modify both the sentiments and opinions of mankind. For in all that constitutes convention, and comes under the universal law of Fashion, women form the ultimate Court of Appeal. Hence, women may be either the guardians of national virtue and heroism, the nurses of national honour, or the mothers only of national luxury and frivolity.

In reviewing these various departments of feminine influence, need we ask where is Woman's mission? Nothing, however, is more crippling to feminine influence than the low estimate which women themselves usually possess of their own powers for good or evil in the world. While in their personal ambitions, their little private intrigues and conquests, women have sufficient confidence in their influence and attractions, yet too often they have no adequate sense of the dignity and responsibility which accompany the gifts of beauty and conversation with which God has endowed them. Hence, the department in which they excel, the very source from which women derive their chief power over men, is often completely alienated from all religious association and sentiment. A woman may be religious, and yet fail to carry religion into that part of her life where its influence, after all, is most needed.

What I want to emphasize is the deep and lasting responsibility attached to womanly characteristics, as distinguished from such as are masculine. Those gifts which are most feminine are always the most dominant sources of womanly influence and power, and it is just these that women are accustomed, nevertheless, to dissever altogether from their more serious thoughts. In dress and manner, in taste and conversation, woman is, and ever will be, profoundly influential. These things can never, therefore, be regarded as trivial, or of little importance in the world. Even the impassioned Isaiah, the evangelical prophet, the S. John of the Old Testament, did not think it beneath the dignity of his sacred office to speak of "wimples and crisping pins," of furtive glances from under darkened eyelids, of the wiles and coquetries of frivolous women, as forming an important factor in the influences which sway national destinies. And it is still true, alike of modern Paris or modern London, as of ancient Jerusalem, that the most flippant of the weaker sex, that young and thoughtless girls of from eighteen to five-and-twenty years of age exercise a most potent sway over the thought, the tone, and the morals of the age. In the words of a great English divine,[1] "Nothing is trivial by which God may be glorified, or by which His name is blasphemed. In the history of Abraham,

[1] Prof. Th s. Rawson, Birks. "Isaiah."

the 'thread and shoe latchet' stand close beside that glorious title, 'The Most High God, the possessor of Heaven and Earth.'" I honestly confess that few natural gifts appear to me so lightly valued, and so much abused, as the gift of physical beauty. I do not now speak of the awful prostitution of it, to minister to the lowest vices of mankind, but of the thoughtless relegation of it to the domain of vanity and frivolity. As if beauty had no power and no charm, except for the wicked. Not that any direct or specific use can be made of it in the interests of religion; but a woman ought to feel that the silent and unconscious influence of her beauty is a thing too deep and sacred to be forgotten, even in her prayers; and that the recollection of it cannot be altogether expunged from her graver thoughts. Are not our loftiest sentiments and truest feelings called forth by our intercourse with Nature? We all acknowledge the charm of a perfect landscape, the soothing and elevating effects of form and colour in sky and sea, in river and wood. We delight in the varying tints of sunrise or sunset, in the silver light of the harvest moon, or the glitter of the starlit firmament as it peers down upon us with its million eyes. These things melt and move us. They have some secret and hidden affinity with ourselves. They stir us to the very depths of our being. We revel in these emblems of natural poetry, which suggest only what is pure

and good; while we feed our eyes, in perfect innocence, upon Nature's loveliness. And can we forget that the human face is a part of Nature too? Nay, it is the highest expression of the Creator's work, the last and crowning effort of His artistic skill, the nearest approach to the thought and image of Himself, and of those holy angels who "always behold the face of our Father which is in heaven." It is as though we had forgotten this, and had ceased to believe that physical beauty had any purpose or meaning in the Divine economy, except to minister to vain and secular eyes, whereas it is a strange and hideous contradiction between heart and face when a beautiful woman is wicked. The gift was surely intended to be to us the very sign and sacrament of goodness. It ought to raise and elevate us, even to look upon a beautiful face. And since women cannot be altogether ignorant of their own attractions, nor of the influence which they exercise upon others, it must be right that they should become alive to the responsibility of the gift, if only to guard and keep it from exercising its potency in wrong directions. Yet I venture to charge holy women and modest maidens with never so much as a thought of dedicating their beauty to Christ, or of asking Him to accept the loan as a sacred offering to employ for His honour and glory. The extreme delicacy of the subject, added to the practical difficulty of employing

such a gift wisely, and the danger of begetting personal vanity in the attempt, has, no doubt, warned off many pious and well-intentioned people from even alluding to the influence of beauty. Then again, Puritanism had taught us to despise, or ignore, all such natural gifts. And since the religious world had withdrawn its influence in the matter, and public opinion, irrespective of the religious world, was not likely to busy itself with questions of human responsibility, it has come to this, that young women who have thought no little about their own attractions, have never so much as heard that those attractions are a sacred gift which should be thrown into the scale of Christian influence—a gift for which the possessors will one day have to give a most solemn account. They have often been pointed to the hour of death, and the loathsomeness of physical decay, and bidden to study the lessons which such visions teach us, but never to regard their strength and beauty as the chief measure of their responsibility on earth; and yet I can assure such persons that if they had not been strong or beautiful, they would have had so much less influence in the world, and, in consequence, much less responsibility also.

But in speaking thus strongly of the influence of physical beauty, it may be said that I am exceeding, if not actually controverting, the emphatic declarations of Holy Scripture. Does

not the Bible distinctly affirm that "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain"? Yes, when they are alienated from goodness and divorced from all sense of responsibility. But the Book of Proverbs is not speaking of beauty in the abstract, as it existed in the intention of the Creator, but of beauty as we too often meet with it in the world, allied with sin, forgetful of its high calling, and prostituted to low or unworthy ends; at the best, viewed only as the toy of fancy, the plaything of men's lighter moments and lighter moods. It is just this view which I am most anxious to combat. I desire to vindicate beauty from the charge of ministering only to frivolity, to place it upon a loftier pedestal, and to assert its true position as the natural handmaiden of purity and goodness. Its office is to suggest what is true and lovely in mind and character. The bridal veil is not worn for itself, but that it may adorn the bride, and beauty is meant to be the natural veil of purity and goodness. There is something horrible and revolting in the discovery that it adorns an ugly soul.

And speaking of Woman's mission in the world, there is one department of feminine influence in which all the resources of Woman's fine and complex nature, and all the powers of her most holy faith, will be taxed to the utmost if she is to remain true to herself, her religion, and her God. I mean her influence over men. No

one can estimate the extent of Woman's directing power, or measure the force which she exerts in this department of her natural empire. Who shall say how much we owe, even now, to feminine influence for the maintenance of our national faith? If it were not for Woman and Woman's goodness, I suspect the world would soon lose faith altogether in the power and truth of religion. Not that positive atheism is by any means common; few men employed in active pursuits trouble themselves much about theological dogmas. They are too busy, perhaps I should say too idle religiously, to take a serious interest in theological speculations, or to be led into metaphysical subtleties concerning the nature and person of God. If only to save themselves the effort of further thinking, they generally acquiesce in the Church's verdict respecting the Deity. It is otherwise, however, with the Church's verdict respecting man. Here they feel competent to judge for themselves. Thus it is a disbelief in goodness, rather than a disbelief in God, which is the particular form of infidelity to which men, in the common walks of life, are exposed. Here is the difficulty we have to encounter. Men, who think they know the world, say that there is no such thing as goodness to be found anywhere, that all is false and deluding, that religion is a base deception; the good women are generally weak, the good men hypocrites. Now, it is for the

women of this country to disprove this assertion, and to demonstrate to men the truth of the Church's allegation, that it is possible to live a Christ-like life on earth. The opposite is a sad and growing conviction, and it is you, and you only, who can disprove it by your lives. You have to win back husbands, brothers and sons, to a lost faith in the power and reality of goodness. The Church's conflict in this twentieth century is with unbelief, and the result of the struggle depends very much upon the faith and devotion of Christian women. If the women of England are true to Christ, their Lord and Master, if their piety is of such a kind that men can see its value and estimate its results, if they are compelled (despite their natural cynicism) to admit its worth and give their judgment in its favour, then our country will be saved from the withering curse of a more than Athenian incredulity. But if women are not true to their nature, their Church and their God, it will not be long ere men pronounce against religion in the most open and defiant terms. For where women are false, men will be sceptical; where they are weak, men will be wicked. If this is so, then the fate of England is in your hands. The redemption of this country from the charge of infidelity lies with you, since it is through your womanly characteristics, elevated and adorned by true religion, that you must seek to restore to masculine hearts their lost faith in

goodness. Not by the piety of sentiment, not by the religion of forms, can you effect this, but only by a nature impregnated with the spirit and temper of Christ. You may, however, attain to a real and lasting success if by honour and purity, by gentleness and truth, by patient amiability and holy courage, by saintly cheerfulness and devout enthusiasm, you are enabled through the ripened sweetness of a lofty and chastened piety to adorn "the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things."

V.

A Parent's Prayer.

JUDGES xiii. 8, 12.

"Come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born. . . . How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him?"

HERE is a parent's prayer respecting the education of his son. It is the father who offers the prayer, but the mother joins in it. The prayer invokes guidance for both. "How shall *we* order the child, and how shall *we* do unto him?"

The answer implies that the mother has most to do with the training and instruction of her children. Though the father offers the prayer, the answer is to the mother. She it is whom God names and appoints as the principal agent for carrying out His purpose towards her offspring. The blessing must descend *through* her.

I need scarcely say that the child of this prayer was Samson, the hero of strength, one of those persons, before the days of a settled monarchy,

whom God raised up from time to time to deliver His people Israel from their oppressors. The distinguishing feature of Samson's victories was that they were accomplished in his own person, by virtue of his own unaided strength and prowess. Other deliverers gathered a band of followers, they raised an army, they inspired others with their courage and enthusiasm, and led them to victory. But Samson fought his battles alone, and won his laurels by the strength of his own arm; and, so far as his mere personal prowess is concerned, he was no doubt the greatest and most remarkable person of those times. In his moral character he was very inferior to Gideon, being passionate and selfish, capricious and revengeful; but in his own self-reliant strength he was a very king of men, and an example to all, delivering his people from their enemies, during a period of twenty years, by the sole exercise of his enormous physical strength and indomitable bravery; fulfilling in his wit, his cunning, and his courage, that ancient prophecy of the tribe of Dan: "Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward."

Such was Samson, the child promised by the angel to Manoah and his wife, who, when they had received such a promise, instead of resting

satisfied with the gift of a son, immediately bent their knees and raised their voices in earnest supplication to God the Giver, that He would fit them for this responsible loan by further instructing them how to use it for His honour and glory. "Come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born. How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him?" "And God hearkened to the voice of Manoah," *i.e.* God came again unto them and instructed them how the child should be educated.

Now, the lessons which cluster round this prayer and its answer are deserving of the most serious and careful consideration on the part of Christian parents. First, it was united prayer; not the wife without the husband; not the husband without the wife. If Manoah offered it, it was on behalf of his partner as well as himself. "Come to *us*, and teach *us*, what *we* shall do unto the child." Next, it was not, like Hannah's prayer, a petition for a mere gift, for a blessing in itself, but for grace rightly to use a gift; not a prayer for a child, but for instruction how to educate the child: "How shall we *order* it, and how shall we *do* unto the child?"

I suppose that many more parents pray for the gift than for the grace to use it, either because they are indifferent and careless about their children's education, or because they think them-

selves competent to order that without the aid of prayer.

But what was the answer to this prayer? "Of all that I said unto the woman let her beware. She may not eat of anything that cometh of the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing; all that I commanded her let her observe; for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death." Two principles are involved in this answer—self-denial and example. And depend upon it, whenever the prayer of Manoah is sincerely offered, the answer to it will be similar. The promised child was to be brought up a Nazarite, that is, dedicated to God by certain vows of abstinence. But that was not all. The mother also, herself, was to become a Nazarite too, for the child's sake. This, then, was the principle of the answer: "Like mother, like son." The blessing was to be earned through a self-denying example.

Now apply this story of Samson and his parents to the case of Christian parents. Your children are, in a sense, Nazarites to God, dedicated to Him in Baptism. They are consecrated from their earliest days to live holy Christian lives. Is that consecration, think you, likely to be real and effectual if you repudiate it by your examples? Is not the way to make it effectual to be yourselves consecrated persons, to

live as you would have them live, sober Christian lives? For this is the lesson of God to Manoah. There are, I imagine, few parents, few married people, who do not recognise the beauty of this story, and who are not ready, in some moment of temporary enthusiasm, to copy the example of pious Manoah and his nameless, but virtuous wife. But have you counted the cost of that prayer for guidance? Have you realised that its answer is to be worked out *in* you, as well as *for* you, and that apart from your own readiness in self-denial, your own fitness for example, the prayer will count for nothing? You can only educate the child by educating yourself. And the lesson is even more emphatic on mothers than fathers, which we should hardly have expected in the case of a Nazarite vow. I wish to emphasize this, that the first and most important thing in parental training is the influence of your own example. In the education of character God will work *through* you. His blessing upon your family will depend very much upon your own fitness to convey it. The parent must not only *tell* his child, but *show* it the way of uprightness. According to that saying of the wise teacher, "I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths."

When the Shunammite's son fainted in the field, under the burning heat of a harvest noon as he cried, "My head, my head," his father said

"Carry him to his mother." It was the natural thing to do. But when the ailment is moral, and the cry is, "My soul, my soul," the parent is not always the best helper in such circumstances. The hands of clergymen and Sunday school teachers are weakened by the want of home sympathy and parental support, and we cannot always say to a son, or a daughter, who is anxious and perplexed with some religious difficulty, "Carry it to your mother, take the difficulty to her." It is not that mothers are without affection for their children, but their affection is not guided religiously. They shrink from the task of educating their children's characters, and it is the very task which God has given them to do. "The greatest moral power in the world is that which a mother exercises over her young child." It has been said that "superior men are all the sons of their mother."[1] In the words of a great French preacher, "Maternity is a ministry. And the first condition of a faithful ministry is disinterestedness. Do not say, 'Here is my child, born *from* me and born *for* me,' but say, Here is a child born into the world for the good of the world. What is this child come into the world for'?"[2] My friends, the answer to that question depends chiefly upon the education, and the education depends chiefly upon the mother.

[1] Michelet.

[2] Adolphe Monod, "Woman, Her Mission."

"The first years belong to the mother, and it is in the early years that the predominant bias is concealed, which often determines the entire course of life."

I doubt whether there be a mother upon earth, who has not hidden in her breast the hope that her infant may one day be good and great. But that hope needs warming and directing. The question asked of S. John the Baptist in his infancy rings in the ear of every mother who is worthy of the name: "What manner of child shall this be?" If you doubt the advantages of early religious training, read in the Bible the effects of early association on Moses, of early example on Joseph, of early prayer on Samuel, and early instruction on Timothy. The Bible is full of historical lessons for parents. Abraham was chosen to be the father of the Jewish race because of his attention to family duties. Eli was rejected, and his descendants deposed from the Levitical priesthood, for his parental negligence. The houses of Jeroboam and Jehu, despite the promise attending their rise, crumbled from the foundation. And though there is no such thing as hereditary godliness, there is such a thing as being blessed "for the fathers' sakes," and those who doubt it can scarcely doubt the opposite truth, namely, that families are often cursed for the fathers' sakes. We have all seen something of the darker side of the third commandment,

"Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children." We have seen it in the effects of immorality, or drunkenness, on a home, in the effects of a careless and irreligious example on the part of parents. "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."

I cannot speak in too strong terms respecting the obligations of parents. "It is recorded, on reliable statistics, that young persons between the ages of fifteen and twenty form not quite one-tenth of the population of this country, but are guilty of nearly one-fourth of its crime." That is a stern fact for parents. Believe me, the want of careful religious training in the young is the plague-spot of our English social life. My friends, the duty lies very near home, and yet many of you are neglecting it. You do not make use of the helps which God has provided for you. And you need helps for the right performance of such a duty. Let me ask, "Do you bring your children to God in prayer? Do you take them with you to His House of Prayer?" You must not send them to church, you must take them, if you wish them to go.

Some of you never read with your family God's Holy Word. You despise such an agency as a Sunday school. It needs some trial, some great sorrow in connection with your family, to open your eyes and expose to you the selfish omissions

of which you are guilty, towards the sacred charge entrusted to your care.

But it is not a religious question only. The education of your children is a question for this world as well as for the next. It ought to be the ambition of every parent that his family should do well and get on in life. It is an instinct of our nature to rise. The instinct may be sadly abused, no doubt; it may need guiding and controlling; but it is a true God-sent instinct that a man should seek to end life at a further point than where he began it. The mistake so many people make is to be satisfied with a mere social elevation, whereas it is not always a good thing to rise socially. A man should seek to fit himself for his calling. How few persons adequately fill the posts they occupy! In every grade of society the complaint is the same. In business, in the labour-market, in the professions, men are unfit for their callings. They are not masters in their profession. Hence so many failures, and so much disappointment. It is not, then, wise to covet a social rank greatly above our position or attainments. Yet every man ought to seek to rise, first morally, then intellectually, then professionally, then socially. And I put it, as one interpretation of this instinct, and of the hope hidden in each mother's heart, that you should give your sons to the work of the ministry. I say this, even to mothers in humble circumstances;

"Cherish the hope that you may one day have a son a clergyman, and if not a son, perhaps a grandson." The hope may be distant, it may seem impossible, but God will not let it wither and die. The fruit of a holy ambition to serve Him is precious in His sight. It shall one day be accomplished. Ruth was only the mother of Obed, but Obed was the grandfather of David, the ancestor of Christ. And so in S. Matthew's Gospel, the name of Ruth, the Moabitess, appears in the sacred line, not only of the Kings of Judah, but also of the Saviour Himself. It was Bishop Selwyn who said, "My fervent prayer is that the ministry of the Church may take root downwards, that many a rustic mother may feel an honest pride in the profession of her son, and bless the Church which has adopted him into her service." But these must not be like Jeroboam's ministers, the "lowest of the people," but men, who by their talents and virtues, have proved themselves worthy of a higher station. Every year the want of men in the Church becomes greater, and I know not how the demand may be fed, unless the hope is engrafted in the hearts of English mothers to give their sons to the sacred office of the ministry. Covet the best gifts for your children. Do not be satisfied with narrow, worldly ambitions on their behalf, but pray God, above all things, that they may be made useful here, as well as blessed hereafter.

There are three prayers of pious mothers recorded in Holy Scripture for our instruction: the prayer of Hannah, the mother of Samuel; the prayer of Manoah's wife; and the prayer of Salome, the mother of the apostles S. James and S. John. The first is a prayer for the child's birth; the second for the child's growth and education; the third for the child's future. Every good mother will seek to make these three prayers her own, to unite, in her private supplications, the petitions of these holy women. She will pray for the child himself; she will ask for instruction how to train and educate her child; and she will petition, also, for his everlasting future, that God will remember him in that day "when He makes up His jewels," and grant him a place in His kingdom and glory, among them that are sanctified "through faith in Christ Jesus."

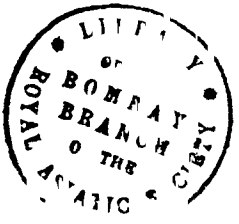
Before I close, let me tell you a dream,[1] which will illustrate the spirit in which parents should intercede for their children. In order to follow me, I will ask you to place yourselves, in imagination, in the deserted streets of a besieged city. Whichever way you turn, ghastly sights and sounds obtrude themselves upon the senses. Black famine stares the people in the face. Horror and despair are depicted on every countenance. All the churches are thrown open for private prayer, and they are thronged with

[1] An actual dream.

weeping suppliants. The crisis has come. It is publicly announced that the stores are closed; supplies have failed, all the provision is done. Meanwhile, groups of pale and haggard women from every part of the city may be seen slowly moving in the direction of the cathedral. Others follow, until nearly the entire population is gathered together at its doors. Once more they have assembled to offer their last solemn prayer for help. What was that prayer, think you? It was not a form of words; it was not the pleading of passionate grief. It was a mute appeal from the suffering mothers of that city. They had brought their little children, all the infants that were still alive. They carried them into the silent church, and laid them before the draped altar. They laid them down, left them, and went their way. They neither knelt, nor spoke, nor greeted one another. There were no tears nor tender partings, but deliberately, and with one consent, as persons engaged in a solemn religious service, they carried their babes to the chancel steps of the great cathedral, left them, and departed. It was throughout an acted prayer, a mute appeal to God the Giver to save their children. As Jochebed cast her Moses upon Providence, committing him to the waters of the Nile, so these famished mothers charged their children upon God Himself. They fathered them upon *Him*, claiming from Him their support and

protection. Was not God their Father? That was enough. They had done what they could; they had left the children with their Father.

Now, in the spirit of that dream, let Christian parents petition God for their families. My friends! Is true prayer an extinct grace among us? Must some dire calamity visit us ere the spirit of supplication is poured out? Let us as a congregation say "No." Let us ask to-day for the grace of intercession. Let us bend our knees and petition God for our families, and for the generation which is to stand in our place. Let us plead, in the words of Abraham, the father of the faithful: "O, that Ishmael might live before Thee!" And we shall share Abraham's blessing upon our offspring, and stand in our lot, at the end of the days, having our names enrolled among those who have served the Christ, and will reign with Him for ever.



VI.

First Steps.

HOSEA xi. 3.

"I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms."

HERE is an illustration borrowed from the nursery. The text is a picture of God's parental discipline, His infinite and unfailing care, as exercised on behalf of His chosen people Israel. The prophet describes an infant in its nurse's arms, making his first essay to walk. The faithful attendant half carries the child. She supports his tottering steps, holding him all the while under the arms, yet so as just to let his feet touch the ground. Thus, by successive attempts from day to day, the child slowly gathers strength, and is at length enabled to bear his own weight and walk by himself. But this result is not attained all at once. Only by degrees do the muscles harden, and the limbs acquire strength and volition. Only by repeated experiments and repeated failures is the end accomplished; so that

those movements which at first were more or less involuntary are brought under the presidency and control of the superintending will.

Here is a lesson on education, for the text is not only a parable of God's care and love, but a picture also of parental duty, since the principle holds good in the child's intellectual and moral culture, as in its physical training. The object of the parent should be to lead up to a condition of ultimate independence; so to educate the child that it shall be able to walk alone; always to make dependence the key to independence; never to assist the child, except with the intention of teaching it to help itself. It is a lesson of no little difficulty, and one fraught with bitterness. The fledgeling bird will one day fly, and the parent-bird is herself preparing the way for that separation. Her brooding care is gradually thrusting out the nestling young from the old nest, by encouraging their feeble efforts and cultivating those new, but rapidly acquired powers, which fit them for a separate existence and a freer life. It is a lesson which the most devoted of parents must learn, that his child's individuality no one can share. His life is a separate thing, which he can but guide and protect for a time, and then leave to Nature and to God. For each one must frame his own future, and make his own way.

I suppose there is no harder task for parental

affection to achieve, than this of fostering in his own offspring the strength of will and force of character which is ultimately to make them independent of himself. At first, the tree protects its seed with guarding blossoms, and swathes its tender buds with leaves. But the blossoms fall ere the fruit ripens, and the leaves hide themselves as the flowers expand. It is so with parental care. It must withdraw its guards as the mind develops and the character forms. It must be willing to sacrifice its own tenderness, and put a restraint upon its own fear, by limiting something of its control, as the child grows, and youth passes into manhood. For between the two extremes of a rigid and over-strict supervision, and a careless and indifferent surrender of all parental authority, lies a wise and happy mean, which it is the parent's part to discover and adopt. Here is the father's difficulty, and the mother's trial. On the one hand, there are the stern unyielding parents, who crush out all individuality in their children—home martinets, whose families are their slaves. Those brought up under their supervision are permanently weakened by the harsh rule to which they are subjected. Their brains gather no force, and their hearts cherish no affection. On the other hand, there are the weak, doting guardians, whose babes are their rulers. Neither of these should expect their families to turn out well. The one is like a tall hedge,

which obscures the sun as well as breaks the wind. The other is like a bare, leafless tree, which can yield neither shelter nor protection. Has it ever occurred to you to ask why the two sons of Samuel were so unworthy of their sire? The prophet himself was undeniably one of the noblest of Old Testament characters, a man pre-eminently fitted to govern, possessing all the attributes of a wise and judicious ruler. How, then, shall we account for the fact that his sons disgraced him? May not the explanation be that Samuel, having before his eyes the culpable weakness of Eli, had fallen into the opposite extreme, and had himself been too strict with his sons? It is a common saying that the families of clergymen often turn out badly. There are so many glorious examples to the contrary, that it would hardly seem worth while to attach much importance to the saying, but if there is any truth in the assertion, may it not be explainable in the same way, namely, that it arises from a too great strictness in their bringing up? I use the word "strictness," not in the sense of severity, but of restraint. For of one thing I am certain, that many a religious home is really a bad school in this respect, that it fails to encourage independence. Its teaching and ideals are so narrow and restricted that the Public School and University, to say nothing of the wider world that lies beyond, immediately encourage a revolt against the thoughts and

maxims of home, and the boy brought up with strict Evangelical, or extreme High-Church views, is destined to receive such rude shocks to his faith as may seriously threaten his belief in God altogether. I have known men, under the influence of a strong reaction from the dogmatism and narrowness of their early religious training, pass through a severe struggle, in which they were well-nigh driven to abandon all hope, and cast religion aside as a hollow and deluding superstition. Now it is a sad thing when a boy's faith has ceased to have any anchorage in the past, when the mind, whichever way it looks for comfort or advice, will certainly not look towards home. It is, I say, a terrible thing to make the inevitable independence of the man (which must come sooner or later), a thing which is forced upon him by the violence of a sudden wrench, and the bitterness of a great reaction. Let us, then, seek to prepare the youth for that independence, by a certain width and comprehensiveness in our teaching, rather than by attempting to tie up his intellect and belief to propositions from which he is certain to break loose.

There is, I know, deep conscientiousness on the part of many religious parents (of a somewhat narrow school) in the dominion which they seek to exercise over their children's faith, and where this is so, perhaps the result is unavoidable, since

we can but act according to our convictions. The apostle Paul, however, tells us he desired not to have his converts in such spiritual subjection. And I question whether the temper I am describing has not in it, generally, some admixture of self-will, to mar the beauty of the sample, which claims to be solely conscientious. If, then, our children hear some teaching which does not quite tally with our own, or come under some influence which appears good and helpful, though, from our own standpoint, it is not perhaps altogether what we should have chosen, yet let us exercise great care, lest in the stern suppression of such teaching or influence, we put a stumbling-block in our child's path.

But there is another form of severity, which can find no excuse in conscientious scruples, which springs only from the love of rule and the desire to assert authority, on the part of the strong towards the weak. Alas! How many children, how many young people, are unhappy at home, through no fault of their own, but through the uncongenial atmosphere of home life! What a cloud is cast over those early days, which should shine as the brightest of all days, through the arbitrary oppression, the tyrannous rule, of older persons, who live, it would seem, only to infuse their own bitterness into the lives of others! Would that such parents could learn, before they have permanently soured the minds of their

children, and substituted fear for affection, that selfishness begets selfishness, and misery, misery. Has it ever occurred to you that that touching Collect for the first Sunday after Epiphany, in which we ask that we may "both *perceive* and *know* what things we ought to do," as well as have "grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same," is a prayer founded on the perplexity of Mary and Joseph, when the Holy Child, the Boy Jesus, tarried behind them in Jerusalem, and at His Confirmation (as we should call it) obtained the first clear view of His exalted future, His Divine Mission, His great and responsible life? It is a prayer for parents in the education, the training and management of their children—a prayer, surely, which every careful father and mother should often have upon their lips: "Grant that we may both perceive and know what things we ought to do." My friends! It is a difficult, as well as responsible, task.

A distinguished American prelate, the late Phillips Brooks, in a touching sermon entitled "The Mother's Wonder," has drawn from the astonishment of Mary and Joseph some admirable lessons for parents. He delineates with infinite tenderness and pathos the feelings of a pious mother, as vista after vista of her son's life opens out to her view. What unlooked-for traits, what unsuspected promptings of desire, what new and startling developments of intellect and character

of taste and disposition, are unfolded, as the child emerges from infancy and passes from the nursery and the school into the larger life which lies beyond. When the Boy Jesus tarried behind at Jerusalem, and the caravan left the Holy City on its way back to Nazareth, "Joseph and His Mother," we are told, "knew not of it." And their surprise only equalled their anxiety when they sought Him in their company, and amongst their friends, and "found Him not." And when they returned seeking Him, the Holy Child met their grave, but gentle rebuke with a still graver question: "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" We can well imagine their astonishment and perplexity, their confessed weakness, and inability to undertake the task of guiding so lofty a mind, or regulating such unlooked-for aspirations.

Well, the episode, in a moral sense, is repeated in the experience of every home, as the minds and characters of our children mature, and they pass out of a state of dependence into one of independence. Every thoughtful parent, as his child grows up, must share in some degree the wonder and anxiety of Mary and Joseph, as they attempted dimly to perceive their duty towards the Holy Child at this important epoch of His life. O! for a quick and discriminating appreciation of those individual characteristics, which call for the most delicate and skilful interpretation, the most tender

consideration and careful guidance! It is so easy to thwart and discourage what may be the leading instincts of a superior mind. We ourselves shall often be astonished and perplexed. Our hearts will beat intermittently with alternate feelings of hope and fear, as we seek to comprehend the gradual, unfolding mystery of a human soul, expanding towards the light; as we endeavour to enter into the trials and difficulties, the hopes and aspirations of our children. With mingled feelings of awe and affection, of wonder and delight, we struggle to understand that which at one moment we seem to know so well, and at another moment so imperfectly—the likeness and the unlikeness to ourselves, appearing as they do in the same members of our family, mixed in the most varying forms, and the most strange and perplexing combinations. All we can do is to fall back upon that old petition for help and guidance from above, which the Church has so well expressed for us in few words, "Grant, O Lord, that we may both perceive and know what things we ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Speaking generally, it is certainly not want of affection that leads parents to fail in their duty towards their children, but want of knowledge and of thought. Parental affection is one of the strongest instincts of the race. We think of the

poor woman before Solomon, who, in order to save her child's life, was willing to forfeit her own happiness and deny herself the tender pleasure of watching and guarding her infant during the years of early childhood. That was no mean sacrifice for a poor, ignorant mother to make. She would part with all that was dearest to her heart, the life-long companionship of her child, the joy of sharing its fond caresses, and listening to its innocent prattle. She would put it from her, as if, indeed, it were not her own, and would relinquish all claim to the child of her affection, the sacred pleasure of feeling it near her, and of being able, with her own hands, to minister to its infant wants, renouncing all the tender joys of parentage in order that she might save its life from the sword. The woman's heart spake out in all the strength of maternal affection, when she cried unto the king, "O, my lord, give her the child, and in no wise slay it." And, my friends, this is no solitary instance of parental affection. It is matter of common experience. When a son or a daughter is delicate, and the medical verdict is that the only chance of recovery is a long voyage, or a warmer climate, when there is no alternative, and separation is a matter of life and death, though the act of parting be bitter, and the loss well-nigh irreparable, yet parental love, regardless of the cost, will quickly make its decision. The mother will sacrifice the chief ingredient in the

cup of her own happiness to save her son's, or her daughter's, life.

But Holy Scripture affords a still nobler instance of parental self-sacrifice in the example of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, for she did not give up the companionship of her boy to save his life, but to ennoble it. Hers was a devotion far loftier and more exalted than that of the poor Hebrew mother who stood before Solomon. It was an instructed and sanctified devotion. It sprang not from a mere maternal instinct, but from the strength of religious conviction. It recognised something more than the bare life of her child. It saw, from the dawn of his earliest years, that character was the principal thing, that nobility of soul and purpose was better than health, ease, or affluence, that it was more important to train her son for God than to claim him for herself; to place him in the way of good and inspiring influences, than selfishly to fold him to her own breast; to foster his mind and understanding, rather than to retain his society; and so she "lent him to the Lord." This is the highest end of parental solicitude, when we are willing to risk our own pleasure, our own interest, our own affection, for the moral and spiritual welfare of our children.

VII.

Religious Education.

1 KINGS xiv. 3.

"He shall tell thee what shall become of the child."

As I stand in this pulpit[1] to-day, and look round on this large gathering of children and teachers, one thought is uppermost in my mind: "What will become of these children?" If we could look twenty years ahead, and pierce the thick veil which hides the future from our view, and follow each of these little ones through the trying periods of childhood and youth; if we could trace each opening life onward through the early years of manhood and womanhood, down to mature age, and then summon these same children from their business or their homes, to meet once more, and tell us the story of their lives, what a revelation it would be! The record would form an invaluable commentary upon early religious training and the

[1] Parish Church, Halifax

advantages of parental discipline. The volume would be a very dictionary of facts for a Sunday school library.

For though there are many things which we cannot foresee, yet there are consequences which follow so closely upon causes, that we can predict them only too surely. And, with respect to the moral effects of certain influences, and a certain line of conduct, we may step at once into the Seer's chamber, and arrogate to ourselves a prophet's foreknowledge, while we proceed to tell you "what will become of the child."

Now, it is certain that the child's future will depend, in part, upon itself; in part, also, upon the discipline and training which it receives from the guardians of its youth.

In addressing you this afternoon, let me divide what I have to say into a word of advice to children, to teachers, to parents.

And first, a word to the children themselves.

My dear children, if you are to grow up like the good children whom we read about in the Bible, it can only be by your having good and great thoughts of God, so that you may walk from day to day as in the sight and presence of God, Who, Himself, knows and loves you. Now there are two thoughts respecting God which I particularly want you to think about this afternoon. Here is one of them: "Thou God seest me." That is one thought—God sees you.

As the heavens are full of stars on a bright, frosty autumn night, like so many eyes in the blue sky peering down upon us wherever we go, so "the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." And do not think that it is only grown-up people that God observes and takes an interest in, for He takes an interest in children. God observes children, and takes account of their ways. He is not a stranger to your little thoughts and feelings, for Jesus, our Saviour, was Himself a child, and He understands child-nature as He understands all nature. We know that God noted the beauty of the infant Moses as he lay in his cradle of bulrushes, hidden among the flags on the banks of the River Nile. His eye observed the baby boy, as he wept and cried for his mother, and God saw that he was a "goodly child." He observed the quarrels of Ishmael and Isaac, as they grew up boys together, and noted that the elder brother oppressed the younger. We read of Joash, who was one of the kings of Israel, and began to reign when he was seven years old, that "Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord"; that Josiah, who was eight years old, "did that which was right"; and Jehoiachin who was also eight years old when he began to reign, "did evil in the sight of the Lord." Thus God observes children, and takes account of their doings. For example, he called Samuel

when only a boy, to his future mission, as High Priest in the room of Eli. He gave to Solomon his name, Jedidiah, which means "beloved of God." He punished the wicked children of Bethel for their irreverence, and noticed the pious influence of the little captive maid who waited on Naaman's wife.

The Lord Jesus drew some of His chief lessons for grown-up people from the thoughts and ways of children.

So that you may be quite sure that He hears you when you sing your Sunday school hymns, such as that beautiful one, "There is a green hill far away," or "Christ Who once amongst us," and that He is pleased when you kneel down at your bedside at night to repeat to Him your evening prayer. Here, then, is the first thought I want you to think about this afternoon: "Thou God seest me."

But God not only sees you, He also loves you. Jesus has said, "I know My sheep." That is my second thought. Christ knows and loves you. "I know My sheep." He calls children His lambs; every Christian child, every baptized child, is one of Jesus' lambs. Among His latest words to S. Peter was the charge: "Feed My lambs." Do not think, because Jesus is now in heaven, that He has lost sight of you. He knows and loves everyone of you. There is no fear that Christ will lose count, or forget the sheep of

His pasture. His eye will continue to follow the straying one, over moor and mountain, through valley and fen, long after the wanderer has lost sight of the Good Shepherd.

There was once a poor idiot lad, who was employed to watch and look after a flock of sheep. A hundred sheep were placed under his care, and well and dutifully the poor fellow executed his charge, and yet he could not learn to count. He could not even count five. But he grew fonder and fonder of his sheep, and none were ever missing. So one day they took one sheep away, to see if the lad would discover its loss, and when he came to them in the morning, he said, going over them one by one, "*You* are here, and *you*, and you, and you, and *you* are gone;" and so he discovered the loss of his sheep, not by the knowledge of arithmetic, but by the knowledge of affection.

And when Jesus, the Great Shepherd, says to us, "I know My sheep," we read in His words not only an assertion of His omniscience, His all-knowledge, but also a declaration of His Divine affection. Never forget, my children, that God not only sees you at all times, but that He knows and loves you.

And now, leaving these two thoughts with you, I turn to your teachers, that I may offer a word of advice to them.

And first, about the preparation of your lessons.

You must be students as well as teachers Enthusiasm alone is not sufficient. It must be coupled with instruction. You cannot measure from an empty sack, or draw water from a dry well. We read of the apostles, on the day of Pentecost, that they were first "filled with the Holy Ghost," and then they taught. This is the true order. We must first know, and then teach. Never condescend merely to amuse your class, by reading to them stories out of Sunday tale books, but *teach*. You have to inform the child's mind upon religious subjects; to feed it with facts and associations. You have to lay a foundation for others to build upon. Your work is to prepare your scholars for their pastor's ministrations, just as the day school, by teaching children to read, prepares them for your ministrations. Remember, that a healthy child is not fed on sweets, but on bread. Set it before yourself, how difficult, yet how dignified and responsible a work that of a Sunday school teacher is, and give to it the prayer and preparation and self-denial which such a work demands at your hands. Give to it your best hours and your best affections. Lend yourself wholly to it. Be in earnest. Concentrate your energies to the task with a "so help me, God." Seek to maintain good discipline in your class; your scholars will honour you for it. Be careful about the regularity and punctuality of your attendance; this is

essential to the making of a good school, and remember, you are the example of your children in this respect. Rather forfeit a meal or a night's rest, than be five minutes late for school. Regularity and punctuality are like the two hands on the clock-face, to point you to your school duties. There are many other things needed in a perfect teacher, but these four—regularity, punctuality, preparation, prayer—are the keys of the position. They unlock most difficulties.

Then, again, there is the influence of example. It has been said that "the secret of Julius Cæsar's success in war was his word of command"; he did not say "Go," but "Come." And the same was observed respecting our own victories in India, in the war with the Sepoys. Their leaders confessed afterwards, "It was not your troops, it was your officers that beat us." They did not say, "Go and seize that gun," or "Go and defend that pass," but they said, "Come on, and we will take that gun, or charge that point." They *led* their men to victory. And so it must be with the officers in the Christian army. They must invite by their example, as well as by their words, according to that saying of the wise man, "I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths." It is an echo of S. Paul's advice to Timothy, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the teaching; continue in them, for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that

hear thee." My friends, the difference between precept and practice is the difference between the dried leaves in a scrap-book and those same leaves when they were fresh and growing. The difference between profession and self-denying service, is that between the flowers and fruits which decorate a Christmas-tree, and the same flowers and fruits as they hang suspended from the living branch which produced them. If our instructions are to influence people, they must be the product of real conviction. We must be producers, and not mere copyists. In the one case, our sentiments are but as the odour of incense, proceeding from a censer, which does not produce it; on the other hand, they are like the smell of a flower which gives forth its own fragrance. If the Church's call is to be effective it must be in the form of an invitation: "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good." Every Christian teacher ought to be able to appeal to his class, or his congregation, as S. Paul did, and say, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."

And this leads me, in conclusion, to add a word of advice to parents. My friends! It is to *you* that we must look for any abiding influence upon the child's life and future. You alone can ensure its regular attendance at school. For six days of the week you have it in your power to enforce or contradict at home the lessons your

children learn on the Sunday. Your practice and example are secretly strengthening, or undermining, all the religious influences which are brought to bear upon your family by the Church. "Do not sin against the child."

We read of Mephibosheth, the infant grandson of Saul, the first King of Israel, that as his nurse fled in haste she dropped the babe, and in consequence of that fall he was lame through life. Now, Mephibosheth's fall illustrates the effects of many a parent's carelessness about a child's education, its schooling and companions, in consequence of which it is stunted and crippled for life. To save a little extra trouble on the Sunday morning, the child is kept away from school, or it is allowed to go late, and thus it never acquires any interest in the school, and gets little or no benefit from it. It is so with the day school. For the sake of the few shillings which a child may earn, it is put prematurely to work, and so robbed of its only chance of acquiring knowledge. That is selfish haste. I do not wish to speak harshly. I know well the difficulties of poor people; what a hard struggle it is sometimes to obtain these advantages for their children. But surely the Sunday school is the cheapest of all educational institutions, and every working-man ought to avail himself of it for his child's good. It is not to the struggling poor that I speak, but to those parents who, for some trifling and

temporary advantage, deny their children all manner of helps which they could easily afford to give them; good books to read, an extra year or two at school, an extra hour or two on the Sunday, more time for their school lessons on summer evenings. But through selfishness or want of forethought these advantages are forfeited. The child is dropped, and Mephibosheth is lame in consequence. I ask, what chance has a girl or a boy, leaving the shelter of home, going forth into the great world, learning day by day the evil of it, mixing with wicked associates, exposed to every temptation of youth, without any counteracting influence in the shape of religious knowledge and association? Is it fair to your children to send them forth, thus exposed and unprotected, to battle with the temptations of the world? As well might you expect to walk between the falling raindrops in a heavy thunder-shower, or stand exposed to the leaden fire of a raking battery, as to resist the encroachments of the world without the shelter and defence of religious principle.

Men talk about secular education. What does it mean? The eye educated, the hand educated, the brain educated, and the heart uneducated. Is that an education for the world? As well might you train up some tender hothouse plant, and force and hasten its growth by means of external heat, and then turn it out in our cold northern climate, to brave the piercing winds and biting

frosts of an English winter. Does it need a prophet to foretell that the plant will die? Do not misunderstand me—I am not speaking disparagingly of secular education. Religion is not a substitute for arithmetic. Piety won't help the shopman to make out a bill, or to count out the change to a customer. But neither will the knowledge of arithmetic keep a man from evil in the hour of a subtle temptation, nor enable him to estimate correctly the moral issues of a certain line of conduct. We need both secular and religious education, for neither can supersede the other. You have only to ask yourself, "What are the repelling forces at work which prevent so many men from living happy, useful, honourable lives?" and you will soon perceive that secular education leaves the most powerful of these forces altogether unopposed. For you can no more resist a moral force by a proposition of Euclid, or a rule in arithmetic, than you can oppose the lightning's flash by a point of steel, or an infectious fever by a strain of music. To draw your sword upon a fire will not quench it. Moral forces must oppose moral forces, and he who would retain his integrity amid the contaminations of the world must be fortified by higher motives than those of policy or self-esteem.

And now, let me appeal to you once more by the thought of your children's future. There is much which is mercifully hidden from us behind

the narrow horizon of the present. The cold grave will open to receive some, disease will set its mark upon others, ere they have doubled the sum of their present years. For our churchyards and cemeteries are full of little graves, and death is busy plucking the flowers of human life ere they blossom in maturity. But though the thought, like a dull pain, pierces many a parent's heart, yet it is not that of which I wish to speak to-day, but the possibilities of life and usefulness, which are wrapped up in the hidden destinies of these boys and girls before us. Yet a few short years, and they will be the men and women who must stand in our place, to carry on our work in the world. How are we preparing them for their mission? Is it by easy indifference that we can expect to launch them into life? Will they mould themselves into heroes without the natural aids which Providence has appointed, in the guardianship of parental affection? These upturned faces are themselves a prayer for a Father's blessing. Will you not lay their weakness and dependency to heart? And while you seek, by every means in your power, to strengthen the constancy of their wills, and to raise the tone of their lives, remember, for your encouragement, that they were God's children even before they were yours. They are His by a most sacred right, and Christ is speaking to you now, to each one of you, and saying, as Pharoah's daughter

said to the mother of Moses, "Take this child, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages." Thus our duty becomes our privilege and exceeding great reward. If we train up our families in the fear of God, if we take and nurse these infants, as a sacred loan from Christ our Saviour, He will reward us with His richest blessing, accepting it as a service done unto Himself; for His own words are, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

VIII.

Christ and the Children.

S. MARK x. 13-16.

"And they brought young children to Him, that He should touch them: and His disciples rebuked those that brought them.

"But when Jesus saw it, He was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.

"Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.

"And He took them up in His arms, put His hands upon them, and blessed them."

THESE words suggest to us some thoughts on the attitude of our Lord towards little children. In order to have real sympathy with others, we should seek to place ourselves in their position, live their life, and so share their interests and pursuits, their joys and sorrows. This is exactly what Christ did with children when He became a child. He entered into their life more perfectly than would have been possible in any other way, for He Himself passed through this special phase

of child-life, an experience which stands alone, separate and distinct from all other phases in the life of man. Thus, He knew by actual trial all the thoughts and feelings of a child. In the early dawn of intelligence He had felt the wonder, as in waking, at the presence of a world wherein all things were new, the sense of awe and mystery which are inseparable from the outlook of a child's mind, the strange and inexpressible delight, too, of early youth, "The bliss of life which Nature gives us." All this the Saviour was familiar with from His own experience; for Jesus "once amongst us as a child did dwell." The same feet which dragged their weary way to the Cross had once faltered in the steps of early infancy, like our own. Thus, when we think of our Saviour's sympathy with children, we should remember first of all that He voluntarily became a child in order that He might share the life, and experience the feelings of children.

And beyond this, during the whole of His three years' ministry, we have repeated proofs of His deep interest in, and warm attachment to, children. There is little doubt that it was the thought of children's wrongs which drew from the lips of Christ that sentence: "Woe unto the world because of offences!" The heart of the tender, compassionate Saviour bled at the recollection of the wrongs inflicted on innocent children, through the ignorance and selfishness of their elders.

How often have parents and guardians betrayed their trust, and been the very first to inflict wrong on their helpless charges! In culpable indifference they have sent them forth into the world, without knowledge, without religion or self-restraint, like a ship deprived of rudder, chart, or compass, to drift in aimless uncertainty on the stormy ocean of life, exposed to all its perils. Well might the righteous Lord, in view of such flagrant omissions of duty, pronounce "Woe upon the world" for its offences.

But compassion for the wrongs of children did not prevent our Saviour from entering into the joyous spirit of childhood. Christ recognised and approved the light heart of a child. We find Him alluding to the games of children, and using them as illustrations in His teaching. He had evidently watched the children at their play, with kindly glance. His eye had rested on the groups of happy children, singing or piping, in the squares and piazzas of Capernaum, as they mimicked the doings of their elders, and played at weddings and funerals, while they clamoured for an audience of those who were often too preoccupied to attend to them. Childhood is the great playtime, and Christ did not question, or look reprovingly upon the noisy, boisterous mirth of the little ones. He did not frown upon this most natural phase of child-life, but welcomed and enjoyed it. Though He was the "Man of

Sorrows," His sympathy was too universal to allow Him to spoil the enjoyment of youth by a gravity which was beyond their years, for the attitude of Christ towards little children had nothing severe or forbidding in it.

And as He did not frown upon the mirth and pleasures of children, so neither did He despise or look down upon them. It is characteristic of a certain class of minds to speak slightingly of children, and to despise whatever is frail or weak. Christ did not lend Himself to any such feeling. He honoured childhood as He honoured womanhood, loved it, even venerated it. Can we ever forget how He once took a little child and set him in the midst of His twelve disciples, and told them, as they strove and wrangled amongst themselves which should be the greatest, that the ideal life, the ideal of the apostolic life, should be innocence and humility, even as the little child before them? Not conquest, nor supremacy, not greatness, such as men covet in this world, but childlikeness in the sight of God, our Creator. Nay, He went further, and assured them that even that great spiritual work of the Holy Ghost on the soul of man, which He calls "entering into the Kingdom of God," was but the higher nature reverting to this nobler type, this Divine pattern of the little child.

Out of this love and reverence for children, we find our Saviour making them the subjects of His

warmest consideration and care. He cured a child of epilepsy, He raised a child from the dead, He received and blessed the infants who were brought to Him by their mothers (as He still does in Holy Baptism), He welcomed their praises, He listened to their prayers, He accepted the loaves and fishes at the hands of the lad whom S. Andrew brought to Him, thus making him the instrument of one of His greatest miracles. Is it to be wondered at if children loved and trusted Him in return? One thing we notice, which seems to point to this: We never read of Christ being mocked by children, as, it is said, Elisha was once mocked by the lads of Bethel. These youths had, no doubt, caught up the feeling of their wicked parents against the prophets of Jehovah, and expressed it in the mocking words which greeted Elisha, as he passed up the hill to their city. Children are quick imitators, and easily become the mouthpiece of public opinion, and where so much hatred was felt to our Lord, the same thing might have occurred which happened to Elisha. The soldiers mocked Him, the priests derided Him, the jeering multitude and the crucified malefactors railed on Him, but children (so far as we know) did not lift their voices against Him. What held them back? Was it not because they loved Him, because He was the children's Friend? He Who was "scorned of men" may, perhaps, from His intense

sympathy with children, have been spared this humiliation.

There are several things said, either of or by our Lord, concerning children, which are never said of others. One is the reference to the worship of children, when they cried "Hosanna" in the Temple after our Saviour's entry into Jerusalem. He called it "Perfected praise," putting it highest among the spiritual offerings of men. Our Lord never used such words of the worship of adults. Thus we learn that Christ accepts the worship of children, listens to their prayers and praises, and counts as holy the offerings of their infant lips. Those who despise children generally show their contempt by their indifference to their spiritual condition. They give them the worst places in Church, they thrust them into a corner. They provide them with the least attractive services, and are content that they should be put off with the worst in everything. Christ did not act in this way, for He provided one out of His two Sacraments for them; for though Baptism is not exclusively limited in its use to children, yet it may, in a very special sense, be regarded as the children's Sacrament.

Another thing which Christ tells us about children is that "their angels do always behold the face of our Father in heaven." This statement seems to teach that little children have their

own angel guards, who are appointed to watch over and protect them, and that these holy and blessed spirits are amongst those that occupy the highest places in heaven, and have the nearest access to the Father's throne.

Again, in the passage from which the text is taken, when the disciples would have hindered the mothers and their babes from coming to Christ, we read, what we are never told on any other occasion, that Jesus was "much displeased," from which we glean that when parents, and others, come between children and Christ, they merit His severe displeasure. He Who commanded them to bring the little children unto Him, and forbid them not, He, Who Himself called them to Him, welcomes both us and them when, in Holy Baptism, in public worship, by teaching or example, we carry them, as it were, to His arms. And He is equally displeased when, by our negligence and indifference, we put hindrances in their way, and so keep them from Him.

But it may be asked, "If the interest felt by our Saviour in children was so great, why did He never summon them to His side for the purpose of instruction?" It may be that He did. We have, however, no record of His doing so. But He has done what is even more important, He has left a distinct command on the subject, inserting it as the first clause in the great commission delivered to the apostle S. Peter, after His

Resurrection, that he should "feed His lambs." In His short ministry of three years, there were other things which Christ omitted personally, but committed to the apostles to do collectively. May not this have been one of them? Is it an unfair inference to assume that our Lord did not, Himself, teach little children, because He left it to the Church to do that? Left it, as one of the most sacred and tender of His commands: "Feed My lambs?"

From the incident of the text we learn what was our Lord's attitude towards children. It is summed up in two particulars: it was the attitude of a Parent and a Priest. "He took them in His arms," we read. Christ embraced these little children, and in so doing, claimed them as His own. In this act He asserted His Divine relationship to them, as the All-Father. He called them to Him, took them in His arms, folding them in His bosom, thus assuring them, by His tender recognition, of His love and protection. And not content with this, He also "put His hands upon them, and blessed them." Now if taking them in His arms was the act of a Parent, assuredly this laying His hands upon them was the act of a Priest. As the Great High Priest, Christ gave to children His solemn benediction. We shall put an altogether unworthy construction upon this incident, and rob it of its strength and consolation, if we attach to it any

less significant meaning. The act was intended to assert Christ's Divine claim upon our children. It was the declaration of a double relation to them, as the universal Parent, and the universal Priest. Christ hereby acknowledges that babes, as well as grown-up people, come within the pale of His Church, and share the blessings of His forgiveness, being partakers in the merits of His Passion, and the benefits of His prevailing intercession in heaven. For our children, as well as for our ourselves, He died and rose again, and ascended to the right hand of the Father. To our children, as well as to ourselves, His call has come down through the centuries: "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not." He is their Father, and their Priest. The Church has ever seen in this act of our Lord's a clear recognition of children in the universal purpose of Redemption, and She makes it the basis of Her appeal in the Baptismal office. With this interpretation of our Lord's act, we can well understand how deep was His indignation at those who would have kept the children from Him. Let us beware lest we do anything to draw down that indignation upon ourselves. What good father or mother does not crave the blessing of Christ on his or her offspring? And yet, from want of thought, from irreligion, from indifference to the services of the Church, from the power of a bad example, these very parents will put

hindrances in their children's way, and hold them back from Christ. O! that the unmistakable attitude of Jesus our Saviour towards little children might induce all such to remove every obstacle which could possibly come between their families and Christ! That through prayer and religious instruction, and a regular attendance at God's House, they may themselves recognise the urgency of the Saviour's call, and experience the power of His Divine blessing.

IX.

The Duty of Intercession.

1 TIMOTHY ii. 1 (R.V.).

"I exhort therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings, be made for all men."

IT is to be feared that among Christian people the habit of prayer is declining, rather than increasing, especially public prayer, and that aspect of it here spoken of by the great apostle, I mean the making intercession for others. Christians do not attach the same importance to this duty as heretofore, nor view it in the light of a sacred privilege, committed to them as members of the one universal Church. They have ceased to feel the solemn obligation devolving upon all Christians, in a greater or less degree, in whatever state or condition of life they may be placed, from the lowest to the highest, the obligation to feel for, and pray for, the whole Christian Body. Yet such is the position which we occupy as members of the Christian Commonwealth.

The Prayer Book assumes this on every page, in every service. It is compiled on this principle, and with this understanding. It assumes that those who come to church, come there to pray, and not only to pray, but to pray for others, to act as intercessors, to offer to God united petitions for "all sorts and conditions of men," at all times and on all occasions. Not only for those whom we know personally, but also for the multitudes whom we have never seen, for the collective needs and wants of mankind. On this plan and theory the Prayer Book is constructed. It treats every worshipper as an intercessor for the whole Church. Regarding him as a member of one Body, it invests him with the duties and privileges which flow out of that membership and belong to that Body. Yet is this the aspect of worship which most commends itself to us? Does our religion include this? Do we not too often lose sight altogether of this high ideal? Do we not forget that our prayers should embrace others, as well as ourselves; that just as our Lord Jesus Christ, since His Ascension and exaltation in heaven, is interceding above for the Church on earth, so it is the duty of Christians also, to join Him in this office and duty of intercessory prayer? Indeed, it is one chief object of the Church's existence. She was founded and created for this purpose, and with this intention. In the Jewish Church the importance of prayer was indelibly

stamped upon the Hebrew mind by the elaborate and impressive symbolism of their Temple worship. Whenever they looked towards Jerusalem, in joy or grief, in hope or perplexity, they felt that in God's Temple on Mount Zion the voice of intercession was being heard and answered. There, in the daily Sacrifice, the lighted Altar, and the Sacred Ark, with its mercy-seat covered with the over-shadowing wings, they had continual reminders of God's nearness and love. In this material and visible church, with its appointed hours of prayer, and its stream of devout worshippers, they had multiplied tokens of Jehovah's presence, and of man's communion with Him. These attesting symbols of Deity were a continual evidence of the Unseen. By coming to God's Temple they could, as if it were, touch the Eternal, and hold intercourse and communion with the Majesty on High. It is true that the most spiritual of their poets and prophets always endeavoured to lift their thoughts above the material Temple itself, to the inward and spiritual worship which it represented. But to every believing Jew it remained, all the same, a perpetual witness to the human instinct of worship, and its Divine recognition by the great Hearer and Answerer of Prayer. But our own wider outlook, our increase of knowledge and privilege, has in some measure obscured this witness. We believe that God is everywhere, and that those

who worship Him are not confined to one mode of approach, nor limited by narrow restrictions of time and place. And if we can rise to this conception, if, in other words, our religion is above that of the Jew, it is, no doubt, a great help and privilege to us. On the other hand, if we cannot rise to it, and our religious fervour sinks below that of the Jew, then both the width of our opinions and the generality of our privileges tend rather to vagueness and unbelief. We forget that, as men on earth, we have needs which should compel us to seek God, Who is in heaven ; that we have not outlived the necessity of prayer, which has still a manifest importance for us, an importance which must ever belong to it so long as we have the needs and desires, the temptations and the aspirations of men.

It is to be feared that both in our neglect of the Sunday, and in the half incredulous attitude which is assumed towards the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit, an enfeebled sense of the importance of prayer is indicated. We are not sufficiently alive to the duty of intercession, nor to the necessity of worship, in our earthly life ; and yet it is to God that we should turn for help in every human need. You may remember, in Old Testament history, how in the camp of Saul, after the battle of Michmash, when the army were in doubt whether or not to pursue the Philistines, that it was the priest who, in the king's and

people's perplexity, volunteered the simple but practical suggestion, "Let us draw near unto God." And in our own times, it is the Church which still repeats the advice, when we are in difficulty or danger, and points us to the same Divine Counsellor for help in the trials and perplexities of life: "Let us draw near unto God."

But in this, as in all besides, Christ Himself is our Example. If we study the Gospel narratives we shall find that the most sacred spots, the holiest scenes of our Saviour's life, are all marked by prayer. Take them one by one, rehearse His three years' ministry, follow, from point to point, the steps of that perfect life. At each turn of the road you may pause and say, "Here, and here, and here, Christ knelt and interceded for man"—at Nazareth, at Capernaum, at Jerusalem. In the savage wilderness, beside the sacred stream, on the mountain-top, beneath the starlit sky, in synagogue, and Temple, and grove, He poured out His soul unto God on behalf of the world He came to save. For those in sorrow, for those in danger, for those in temptation, He pleaded with earnest supplications and prayers. Before any great epoch of His life, at the laying of each successive stone in the fabric of His future Church, He prefaced the act by prayer. Before the calling of the Twelve, at the Last Supper, in the Garden, and on the Cross, Christ was then, as

now, the great Intercessor. Such was our Saviour's personal example. And women have ever been foremost among those who followed Him in this. Thus, Salome, the Syrophœnician, and Mary, the mother of Mark, were all intercessors. During the ten days which succeeded the Ascension, women are specially named as continuing with the apostles in prayer, for the promised gift of the Holy Ghost. The same little band who ministered to Christ of their substance, and followed Him to the Cross, were the nursing mothers of the infant Church in its weakness and obscurity. Thus, the first witnesses to the Resurrection were also the first intercessors in the Christian Body which was the fruit of that Resurrection. A solemn waiting-time had been enjoined by Christ as a test of His disciples' faith, and a vehicle of their expectancy. How did they spend it? How did they wait? They waited as Christians should — they waited in prayer. For "all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and with His brethren." It is the last mention made of the Lord's Mother. There is no dramatic exit, no touching farewell, or tragic martyrdom. We only know that she was one among that steadfast few, that little group of holy women whom S. Luke depicts interceding for the Church, prostrated before God, waiting in the antechamber, praying

for the Holy Ghost. She passes from our sight, as do all that live this life of ours. But it is surely a beautiful thought that we leave her, who was pronounced "blessed among women," upon her knees. The sacred historian draws down the curtain upon a kneeling figure, and the biography of the Virgin Mother closes at this point. But, indeed, it appears to have been one of the characteristics of S. Mary that her clinging faith and womanly affection enabled her to plead with Christ the wants of others. It made her a skilful advocate. And the same feminine attribute, on the other hand, enabled her to influence her friends, and to explain to those with whom she came in contact the wishes of her Lord. At the marriage of Cana, when the supplies unexpectedly fail, it is Mary who goes to Jesus and makes known this domestic want. With the quick intuition of affection she immediately apprehends the difficulty, and lays the case before her Lord, "They have no wine," she says, and the same loving intervention is employed to prepare the minds of the attendants for the Saviour's commands, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." Thus she acts as a mediator between Christ and her kinsmen. And the Church of Rome has taken this passage as an indication that the Virgin Mother is still a mediator and intercessor for man. This, we think, is a dangerous representation of the case. The sympathy of Christ is perfect; it

needs no supplementing. Besides, He only is omniscient, He alone can gauge the needs of mankind.

But there is a lesson which we may learn from the example of S. Mary, which intrudes upon no mystery, and violates no canon of interpretation. It is a lesson on the duties of maternity. Here we may safely follow her example, for all mothers can be intercessors for their infant children. They can plead with Christ for the wants which those little ones are unable to plead for themselves. They can also explain to their children the commands of Christ, and be living exponents of His wishes. Their whole life may be a practical comment on those words, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." In this way they can act as mediators, and imitate the Virgin Mother, while they witness in the home and in the heart for Christ.

I cannot but think that women, with their warm affections, their living faith and deep devotion, their inherent instinct of worship, were intended, in a very special and peculiar sense, to act as intercessors in the Church for those whom Christ died to save. Are they fulfilling their mission? Are they responding, as their sex and fitness demand, to this natural call to serve God in this way, by offering up "prayers and intercessions for all men?"

X.

S. Mary the Virgin.

S. Luke i. 38.

"Behold, the bondmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy word."

In dwelling upon the character of S. Mary the Virgin (selecting the more obvious features), we may regard it as unfolded for us in seven particulars—her humility, submission, faith, obedience, devoutness, teachableness, and recollectedness.

And first, her humility. She was the *lowly* one. Not only the maiden of low estate, *i.e.* lowly in station, but lowly also *in* heart. We know that the Virgin was poor, from her slender offering of two turtle doves at the presentation of our Lord in the Temple. It is implied, also, that she was "poor in spirit," that she possessed that heavenly grace of humility which our Saviour commended in the Sermon on the Mount. In the *Magnificat* there is an evident play upon this double meaning

to the word "lowly." "He hath regarded the lowliness of His handmaiden," "He hath scattered the proud and hath exalted the humble and meek."

You remember, in the legend of King Robert of Sicily, how Longfellow, in his graphic sketch, depicts the loud monotone of triumph jarring on the ear of the haughty King as the priests, in the *Magnificat*, chanted the words "He hath put down the mighty from their seat," until, humbled and abased, God had taught the wayward monarch (like Nebuchadnezzar of old) the impotence of pride, and the dignity and greatness of humility. Well, Mary had got this lowly grace. And God regarded both her poverty and humility, her lowliness, and her low estate, when He chose her for an absolutely unique position in His Church, honouring both her person and her sex in such a way that "all generations have called her blessed."

And as a feature of this humility which S. Mary possessed, we notice further her perfect submission; "Be it unto me according to Thy word." It has been said that "Woman's mission is submission," and that is apparently the view of the Church, founded upon S. Paul's statement: "I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man"; and it is the reason, I take it, why in the marriage service the vow of obedience is added to those of honour and affection. In these

days there are some who, maintaining the absolute equality of the sexes, regard the distinction as invidious, and would immediately expunge what they so much dislike. But whether the vow to obey is ever omitted or not in the Prayer Book, we venture to think that it will remain uncancelled, all the same, in the Service Book of God. Anyway, this spirit of submission was a noticeable feature in her whom God chose as a special subject of His favour, and adorned with the highest honour of her sex. Mary accepted the responsibility entrusted to her, as the voluntary slave and willing vassal of Jehovah. "Behold, the bondmaid of the Lord," she exclaims, in ready answer to the announcement of the archangel, "Be it unto me according to Thy word."

Nor was this the only evidence of Mary's submission. We see it in her deference to her husband, and in her attitude towards Jesus at the Temple. It is even more noticeable at the marriage feast of Cana, and beside the Cross. Indeed, the Mary whom S. John led away from the last closing scenes of the Crucifixion, seems to us almost another person from the Mary of the Annunciation. But the difference was only that which sorrow had wrought in the ripened heart and character of a good and tender woman. Trial and suffering are crucial tests of our submission. Even the patience of Job gave way under the strain of repeated trials and misunder-

standings. Thus, it is in the hour of sorrow or affliction that we find it hardest to show forth this grace. We give it then a holier name, we call it "resignation," when it enables us to bow in uncomplaining submission beneath the mighty hand of God. It was this which formed the best side of Eli's character, and gave strength and beauty to an otherwise weak nature. For under severe trial Eli was another man, and rose to an ideal expression of saintly heroism, as he exclaimed, "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good."

Again, we note also in S. Mary the grace of faith. The Virgin would not have been chosen for her responsible position in the Kingdom of God, had she not manifested this elemental grace of faith. And it is one side of that blessing, which singled her out as the recipient of privileges shared by no other, that she was pronounced blessed in having "believed." Here she appears in strong contrast to Sarah, the wife of Abraham, who, when the future birth of Isaac was foretold, greeted the announcement with levity and incredulity, laughing within herself behind the tent door. And that unbelieving woman's laugh has been chronicled and handed down to succeeding generations, as the one betraying weakness of a character otherwise strong and noble.

But if Mary, unlike Sarah, is presented to us as an example of quick and ready faith, no less does

she stand before us as an example of obedience. For obedience is the corollary of faith, and her advice to the attendants at the marriage of Cana may be taken as an indication of her own mind and temper, and as conveying a principle which really governed her whole life: "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it."

But again, another feature of the character of S. Mary was devoutness. As one aspect of this devoutness, we notice in the Virgin a developed faculty of wonder. For wonder is nearly allied to reverence; indeed, there is always something wanting (and the want suggests deterioration), about a mind in which the faculty of wonder is lacking. There are men who go about God's world, but they are all along blind to the marvels of it. To such people there is no mystery in life, and no mystery in nature or religion. All is commonplace, and taken for granted. It evokes no surprise, begets no awe, and kindles no thankfulness. It is to be feared that our own age, in its fancied possession of knowledge and its eager search after pleasure, bears this mark of superficiality—that it is not imbued with the reverence of wonder. In this the child, the saint, and the philosopher, all meet and have something in common. For there is not only mystery in God, but in ourselves, in the world, and in the common objects around us. Everything involves what is unknown and unknowable: hence its wonder.

And it is not a sign of knowledge or greatness to ignore this, but only of ignorance and littleness in the observer. Most people are conscious of a certain sense of awe and mystery associated with night. This arises, no doubt, from the fact that we only see things dimly in the night-time. The earth and its beauties are only partially defined, and are more or less hidden from us. And this is really so in the day-time. To the man who looks beneath the surface of things, to the thinker, whether scientific, philosophic, or religious, it is obvious that all things are seen but dimly, and the world remains full of mystery.

Well, S. Mary, it would seem, had this faculty of reverent wonder. She "marvelled," we read; she "wondered," she was "astonished," she was "amazed," not only, as has been pointed out by a great modern preacher,[1] in connection with the marvellous development of wisdom and knowledge in her Divine Son, not only as feeling the "Mother's wonder," which looks in startled surprise at each unexpected advance, as the babe she has fondled passes into the boy she loves and the man she reveres, but in other departments of her experience Mary felt wonder upon wonder, as she listened to the things which were told her concerning her child. Not that Mary's devoutness was limited to this saintly faculty of reverent wonder. As the author of the *Magnificat*, she

[1] Phillips Brooks.

takes a first place among the sacred hymn-writers of the Church, and in other ways shows that devoutness was a conspicuous attribute of this honoured woman.

From many delicate allusions in the Gospels we glean that S. Mary united in a remarkable degree the characteristics of the two sisters of Bethany. She combined the contemplative nature of Mary with the practical good sense of Martha. It is true that with the early death of her husband, Joseph, and the awful and tragic events associated with the Crucifixion, we naturally invest S. Mary with a veil of mourning. She was the "Mater Dolorosa," the Mother of Grief, and this may have added its own aspect to her devoutness. But along with this, the religious side of her nature, she clearly possessed other qualities of an opposite character, such as good sense and womanly activity. None but the most capable of mothers could, under exceptionally trying circumstances, have ministered with her own hands to the wants of her new-born infant. And when, on a subsequent occasion, we listen to the calm, practical advice given at the marriage feast, we are confirmed in this impression of the Virgin Mother. But if she was active and practical in her nature, she was also devout.

And in connection with this, the deepest side of her character, we notice two things:—teachableness and recollectedness. Like Samuel, and

like Lydia, she had "the hearing ear." Even before the birth of her Divine Son, Whose teaching was, "Let these sayings sink down into your ears," the attitude of her mind, in its open and unbiassed teachableness, was an embodiment of those words, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." This attitude of listening, attentive devotion, has often been caught by great painters, and represented in their productions as that most applicable to the recipients of a Divine revelation.

At the Annunciation we naturally contrast Mary with Zacharias. The former, in her wonder and awe, still asked for further instruction; the latter infused into his question a doubt, "Whereby shall I know this?" a doubt which brought sure and speedy chastisement.

And if Mary had this grace of teachableness, so also had she that which, in the worshipper or the religious student, is equally important—the grace of recollectedness. On two separate occasions we read that Mary "kept all these things" —the story of the shepherds, and the sayings of her Divine Son; "kept them" and "pondered them in her heart," kept them by pondering them, by meditating and turning them over in her mind, until they became a part, not only of her creed, but of her very nature, a possession inalienable, and forming a part of the saints' eternal inheritance in the world beyond the grave.

Such were the characteristics which won for a lowly Jewish maiden the Divine choice and the Divine blessing, and drew forth from the Archangel Gabriel himself, the assurance: "Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favour with God."

XI.

The Mother of the Lord.

LUKE i. 28.

"Hail! thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women."

THE 2nd of July is one out of three days, besides the festival of the Nativity, on which the Church commemorates and brings to our notice the Person and Example of S. Mary, the Virgin Mother of our Lord.

During the six weeks succeeding the Festival of the Holy Trinity, the Old Testament Lessons introduce us to a select group of holy women, whom Providence raised up from time to time to fulfil important duties, and to take part in the various events which were gradually moulding the history and shaping the destiny of the chosen race. And the 2nd of July, by bringing to our notice the one woman of our race who, of all others, has been most influential in the deliverance of mankind from the chain and thraldom of sin,

completes the series in the person of S. Mary, and so places her at the head of the list.

Now we must not imagine that these Jewish heroines, such as Deborah and Hannah, Ruth and Esther, were mere ordinary women, representative of the daughters of Israel. The fact that their names are singled out from among others, to appear in the Sacred Narrative, itself implies that they were endowed with more than ordinary gifts, and were fitted by God to exercise a special influence on the times and fortunes of their country. Out of the dim light of those rude, unsettled times in which they lived, their figures stand out in clear outline against a background of prevailing darkness, through the luminous brightness of their own inherent faith and purity. And if this is so of such women as Ruth and Hannah, still more does it apply to individuals like Martha or Salome, who followed the steps of our Saviour Himself, and whose influence entered into the fabric of the Gospel history. If Deborah's courage and Esther's beauty led to Israel's deliverance at certain periods of Jewish history, a still greater deliverance was wrought at a different period, and in another province, by Elisabeth's faith and Mary's obedience.

Among all these, Mary, in one department of her influence, occupies a unique position, since she was chosen to be the Mother of our Lord. In other respects we think of her as a saint among

saints, teaching only by her goodness and example. Thus, if we consider the matter, we shall see that since it was ordered in the Divine economy that our Blessed Lord should take flesh and be made man of the substance of a human mother, it is certain that in the all-wise purpose of God, S. Mary was divinely chosen and fitted for this unique position and superlative honour.

In a less degree, the same is no doubt true of the parents of Moses, Samson, David, Samuel, and S. John the Baptist. All these were selected by God, and raised up to fulfil, through the gift of parentage, a distinct duty and commission. And in a still lower degree, the same is true of all parents. For parentage is a sacred charge from God Himself, entrusted to the husband and the wife, however little they realise the solemn character of its grave, though tender, obligations. Think what a different world it would be if all parents received this hallowed commission as from the hand of Christ Himself. If all mothers welcomed the gift of a child as did S. Mary, when she said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it unto me according to Thy word."

Here, then, we have the ideal of the Creator: not the single, the celibate life, but the twin, the dual life—that man should fulfil his appointed work and destiny in the world in this way, going forth to life's duties in pairs, two and two, as at the beginning. And our Saviour, by His

entrance into our world as a babe, "born of a woman," has put the stamp of His approval upon Nature's ordinance. For maternity was perfected and idealised in the person of Mary, the *Mother*.

There are, it is true, other ideals. For example, the ideal of a Sisterhood may, in some cases, be permissible. Holy women were employed by S. Paul as deaconesses in the early Church. But this is not the highest ideal. It is incomplete and erratic; it is rather against Nature than in accordance with Nature, like a tree with its branches lopped, or cut into some fantastic shape. At the best it is a *second* nature, but it is not the ideal of the Creator, and if it involves the taking of vows, it may be questioned whether we have always the right to pledge the future in this way, and to sign away absolutely, as some do, our time, or our property, beyond our own power to redeem it. Strictly speaking, the future is not ours to give. At any rate, such a course must often be succeeded, like Jephthah's rash vow, by life-long regrets. And it is to be observed that our Lord did not suggest or enjoin any such new ideal, but chose the old one, which God had blessed and made sacred, from the days of Adam and Eve. Even the apostles themselves were not a celibate brotherhood, though we might rather have expected them to be so. In His ministry Christ welcomed, as we know, the mothers who brought their little

children to Him, and far beyond any teaching on the subject is the fact that He exalted maternity and put upon it the highest construction of which it was capable. For he used it as the earthly medium of His own Incarnation, by which maternity was made to fulfil the holiest and loftiest purposes of Redemption. It might have been otherwise. It might have pleased the Almighty to redeem mankind by some other plan. God's "hand is not shortened that it cannot save" by means outside the province of human thought and speculation, but it pleased Him to employ this principle of natural order, to graft the gospel of His Grace upon Nature, to take the law of maternity, first exemplified in Eve, and through the union of the human with the Divine nature, to make it the foundation of man's restoration and re-creation in Christ. For man has a material as well as a spiritual nature. Hence it was necessary that there should be a material basis for redemption. That material basis was supplied by the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When, then, the archangel greeted Mary as "highly favoured" and "blessed among women," the words did not apply so much to the Virgin's individual character as a saint, but rather to her unique calling as a mother. You will remember how S. Paul used to dwell upon the fact of his Divine commission as something separate from,

and independent of, what he was in himself. "Am I not an apostle?" he asks. So he commenced epistle after epistle: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God." Not "I am a good man, Paul," but "I am an apostle," or messenger of the Lord. In the same way Mary was highly favoured, not merely because of her faith and obedience, not merely in consequence of her personal holiness, though this was necessary, but in consequence of the unique honour put upon her in being the "Mater Christi," the ideal Mother and hand-maiden of the Lord. And there is no Romish superstition in dwelling upon this. It does not exalt S. Mary in other respects, or give to her attributes such as those with which the Church of Rome invests her, independently of the Incarnation. It only pronounces her blessed, superlatively blessed, in the realisation of her unique maternity. Every mother is blessed in some degree, who is happy in the virtue and well-being of her children. The son, who goes out from the parental home, to wrestle bravely with the world and conquer some of the evil within it, the daughter, who by her life and conversation, "adorns the doctrine of God, our Saviour, in all things," alike bring a blessing upon their mother, and cause her to share with Mary, the ideal Mother, the honour of maternity. Was not that brave old Highland widow blessed, who, after the

death of her soldier husband, gave her six stalwart sons, one by one, to the war, that they might win or die in the same cause? And was not she, too, blessed who, when tidings were brought that her only son, a missionary among savage tribes, had been martyred at his post, exclaimed:

> "Were the whole realm of Nature mine,
> That were an offering far too small;
> Love so amazing, so divine,
> Demands my soul, my life, my all"?

Yes! These, too, in their own degree, were blessed. And so is every mother whose sons, by steadfast faith and honest toil, fulfil their work in the world, especially those who choose for that work the sacred ministry of the Church.

We learn, then, from the case of the Lord's own Mother, how God can bestow His choicest blessings upon us in and through the common duties of life. S. Mary was, no doubt, chosen as a model of her sex for the peculiar honour that awaited her. We have sufficient proof in the Gospel history of her faith and goodness, that she was "a perfect woman, nobly planned." But in her outward lot and station there was nothing whatever unusual; she was a simple village maiden, with apparently no opening in life beyond the usual one of marriage in humble circumstances. She was, indeed, fortunate in being espoused to a good and upright man, one

Joseph, a village carpenter. No higher destiny, however, awaited her, apparently, than to fulfil in her own humble condition the duties of wife and mother with fidelity and devotion. But because she was worthy, God chose her for the highest lot that woman has ever filled on earth. Yet this was accomplished, not by her being asked to do something out of the natural sphere of woman's home-life, but by her being required to occupy that sphere under its divinest conditions. What a reward, to be permitted to guard the infancy of Christ! To shield the Babe of Bethlehem from the treachery of Herod and the malice of Satan, as Jochebed sheltered Moses from the cruel edict of Pharaoh! Thus God blessed Mary by making this natural and common ministry of maternity, by which the race is replenished and mankind is preserved, a ministry also of salvation to the ends of the earth.

XII.

Two Blessings.

S. Luke i. 28.

"Blessed art thou among women."

Twice in the Sacred Narrative has female heroism earned for itself this superlative title—once in the Old Testament and once in the New Testament. "Blessed above women shall Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent." Such is Deborah's encomium of Jael's fortitude and courage in the assassination of Sisera. Again, at a much later period of the world's history, under circumstances happily changed, and with respect to one vastly superior to the heroine of the Book of Judges, the old sonnet is once more sung, and the old title revived: "Blessed art thou among women." "All generations shall call me blessed."

We can scarcely conceive a stronger contrast between two heroic natures than is supplied in the person of Jael, and in the person of Mary the

Mother of our Lord. The blessing of Jael, however, was but a questionable and tentative blessing, while that vouchsafed to Mary was an honour in which every woman may feel that she has a share. For the Incarnation of Jesus, our Saviour, did honour to the sex. It elevated woman. It reached beyond the person of Mary, the Virgin of low estate, and shed a halo of glory around the head of every maid and mother, who, like Mary, has found that true blessedness which consists, first, in the possession of lowly contentment and feminine nobility, and secondly, in the knowledge and possession of Christ Himself.

But take first the blessing pronounced upon Jael: "Blessed above women shall Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent." There is an evident play upon these words in the verses which follow, a strain of poetic irony runs through the whole passage: "He asked water and she gave him milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish." Jael hastened to fulfil all the requisite duties of her sex and station. She even exceeded the conventional demands made upon her hospitality, in the attention and courtesy which thus provided for the stranger who sought the shelter of her tent for rest and refreshment. Sisera imagined that he was safe within the precincts of a neutral tribe. But these acts of seeming courtesy were

only a veil to hide a desperate purpose. Under the mask of womanly kindness and sympathy, the heart of Jael beat with a strange and savage patriotism, and a more than Semitic ambition for revenge. With feminine duplicity and masculine determination she coolly played her treacherous part, and in so doing became the sanguinary executrix of her people's wrongs. We offer no vindication of the rough heroism which prompted Jael to steep her hands in blood, and nerved her arm for the accomplishment of an act of deliberate assassination. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that the times in which she lived were times of anarchy and bloodshed. For nearly a quarter of a century the Israelites had been subject to the cruel and galling oppression of the aboriginal races of Palestine. For their grievous sins God had sold them into the hand of Jabin, King of Canaan, and mightily he oppressed them twenty years. And when, at length, deliverance was promised, it was not in honour and bravery that their freedom was destined to be won, for in their long and servile captivity the nation had forfeited the character which, in their nobler days, we always attribute to the Hebrew race. Even their generals needed the protection of a female convoy, and the inspiration of their national prophetess, Deborah, to invest them with the courage and determination necessary to risk an engagement with their

oppressors in the open field. Under such circumstances, it is not difficult to forecast that by subtle methods, and a tortuous policy, this enslaved people would cast off their galling yoke. It is what we should naturally expect. And Deborah and Jael were the agents employed. Thus, there was heroism of a kind in this sanguinary act of Jael's, which completed so ruthlessly the victory which Deborah had foretold. There was patriotism and courage in this Charlotte Corday of the Old Testament. But it was not the heroism of Queen Esther, or Joan of Arc; and the lesson which we learn from the action of Jael is that woman should not lightly forsake the natural domain of feminine influence and duty. The Creator has marked out with sufficient clearness her appointed province and destiny, in the physical conformation and mental characteristics of her sex; and to attempt to leave the sphere which Providence has ordained, is to seek to offer with undedicated hands the strange fire of an unconsecrated ambition. Jael left the ordinary and assigned sphere of feminine duty for that of the opposite sex. Beneath her woman's garb she wore a soldier's corselet and a masculine heart. She substituted for the law of kindness, the law of force; and in invading the territory of masculine duty, she won for herself a half-dreaded name and a questionable blessing. She changed the hospitable tent, where womanly

kindness officiated, and womanly grace presided, into the bloody camp of war. Jael, herself, may indeed be excused, may even be lauded, on the ground that desperate needs call for desperate remedies, but the general lesson which we draw from her history is that woman is more blessed in her natural and appointed sphere of duty than out of it. For her, true blessedness is won, not in snatching from masculine hands the prizes and awards which belong to the proud conquerors of this world, not by assuming masculine habits, nor by joining in masculine pursuits. She was never intended to compete with man in the open market of the world, for wealth, or fame, or earthly honours, but in lowliness of mind and nobility of soul, to compete for that nobler prize of a kingdom which cometh not with observation, and a peace which is the gift of God only.

But of late, the world has been inundated with a new ideal of feminine independence. A wide and popular movement, advocated by some able thinkers, was started some years ago in defence of what were called "the rights of women." It was asserted that even in highly civilised countries, like our own, woman was still subjected to a species of social slavery, and that she occupied a false and dependent position in law, in society, and in her relations to the opposite sex—a position at once unjust in its restrictions and short-sighted in its policy. The movement

advocated a higher education for women, and a much greater freedom of action than they had hitherto enjoyed; maintaining that they could never attain to a true and proper position in society except as the legal and acknowledged equals of men in every respect. There was no doubt some truth in the charge levelled against English thought and English custom, in the inferior education usually given to girls in almost every rank of life, except the highest. It is also true that various employments which were formerly closed to women by traditional usage, have been thrown open to them, with decided advantage both to themselves and their employers. In this way the movement has done good. It has raised public opinion with respect to the mental powers and business capacities of women. It has corrected some abuses, and drawn attention to some wrongs. So far, we sympathize with its promoters. It has exhibited the need of a higher education for girls, which, within sober limits, was required in almost every grade of English society, to enable women to become real helpmates and companions to men. But further than this we refuse to go. For we cannot consent to see the old ideal of womanly supremacy in the home superseded by a new ideal of feminine ambition, which is to place men and women, in all respects, upon an equal footing in the race of life. We see the greatest possible danger in such an attempt.

We believe it to be subversive of all natural instincts, and of the laws alike of religion and of true progress. It is in direct opposition to that Divine ideal which, in the beginning, made the sexes complementary, and not independent of each other. There could scarcely be a more unnatural schism than that which modern thought has striven to produce between the two, by raising that old question, which once separated even the twelve disciples themselves—I mean the question, "Which should be the greatest?" It is well that here, as elsewhere, human instinct has shown itself wiser than human theory. For while some modern teachers have endeavoured to put man and woman in antagonism, and to sever those whom God made for each other, our practical good sense has, on the whole, contented itself with a few necessary reforms, and left the advocates of woman's rights to theorise to themselves.

Nevertheless, the movement has left behind it certain evil consequences, as such movements commonly do. For it has inspired hopes which are not likely to be realised. It has left in the minds of many women an uneasy sense of half-awakened ambition for some higher and ill-defined mission, not yet revealed to them, making them discontented with their lot. It has had, moreover, a prejudicial influence upon society, in the diminished deference which men are accustomed,

in these days, to pay to women. The old feeling of honour and chivalry is fast giving way to that of a brusque, and even coarse familiarity, which is only the natural consequence of women's altered relations towards men. For though the movement of which I have spoken has not actually interfered with the laws of marriage, or the sanctity of home, though women have generally consented to retain their old and established position in society, yet these new theories are abroad, and have infected the popular mind, in a greater or less degree, and the result is only too apparent. For you cannot sweep away all restrictions to female liberty, and give to women the same social freedom which is granted to the other sex. You cannot ask them to cope with their competitors on equal terms, in politics, in the professions, in trade, and yet expect men to retain the same deep homage, the same old feelings of honour and chivalry, which women have been accustomed to command.

Again, if woman is to emulate the more ambitious pursuits of men, she must be prepared to share with them many anxieties and toils, from which she is now exempt, and, in entering upon a life of greater hardship, to forfeit also something of the tenderness and devotion with which she has been hitherto regarded. Reverse her present position, and you take from her her true glory, which is as the companion and helper

of man, endowed with all womanly attributes, to sit as a queen, exercising a dominion all her own, enthroned by natural laws of chivalry and tenderness in the hearts and affections of the race.

No doubt, there are some women who have been great and useful in a life that was not sketched upon feminine lines, but generally, we are convinced that woman only loses by stepping aside from the conventional and well-trodden path of feminine influence and duty. Even though she appears to win a passing fame and glory in the attempt, her success is partial and transitory. As in the case of Jael, there may be a certain mistaken heroism in her acts and ambitions, as she proceeds to climb to heights never destined for her feet to tread, but like Jael, she wins a tentative blessing; for in its acquisition she forfeits those depths of sentiment, that world of affection, and that tranquillity of soul, in which woman's true blessedness does, and ever will, consist.

And now turn for a moment from the blessing of Jael to the blessing of Mary—from the dark thoughts and passionate nature of the wife of Heber the Kenite, to the pure and gentle spirit of the sweet, unsophisticated maiden, divinely chosen to be the Mother of our Lord. We feel instinctively that we have ascended to a higher platform, that we have left the Old Testament for the New, and are dealing now with a nobler type

of character; that we have passed at once from a world of policy, ambition, and intrigue, to serener heights of faith and holiness. In the person of the lowly Virgin, we enter the home of true saintliness, to find in her peaceful and unsullied bosom the abode of many a despised and neglected virtue. Here we have dutiful, unquestioning obedience, coupled with cheerful and dignified content. Instead of a heart at war with itself, the scene of conflict and stratagem, instead of a wild chaos of mixed and contending emotions, such as those which must have agitated the breast of Jael, we have the unruffled calm of a soul at peace with God, a mind open to spiritual impressions, a life fitted to be the subject of angelic annunciations. The choice of Mary as the Mother of our Saviour, has fixed for ever the seal of the Divine commendation upon lowly piety and unconscious goodness, as the accepted type of female excellence. Through her we are taught wherein woman's true blessedness consists. Do we not learn this from the Virgin's idea of fame, expressed in her own words, "All generations shall call me blessed"? "A true woman's thought,"[1] says an able writer, "for so far as a woman is sincere to the nature God has given her, her aspiration is not so much that the world should ring with her fame, or society quote her as a leader of fashion, but that she should bless, and

[1] Stopford Brook (Sermons), "The Virgin's Character."

be blessed in blessing. It is not that she should not wish for power, but that she should wish for a noble, not an ignoble, power. It is not that she should not wish to queen it in this world, but that she should wish to queen it, not by ostentation of dress or life, nor by eclipsing others, but by manifestation of love, by nobility of gentle service, by unconscious revelation in her life, and conscious maintenance in others, by her influence of all things true and pure, of stainless honour in life, of chivalrous aspiration in the soul. At home, or in the wider sphere of social action, her truest fame is this, that the world should call her blessed."

Such an idea of fame is far removed from the disturbing dream of ambition which haunts the lives of many—a dream which resolves itself into a feverish desire to be conspicuous rather than to be useful; which chafes at every social restraint, and burns with passionate indignation under the endurance of a thousand imaginary wrongs. Only let woman set herself quietly and seriously to work, to fill that natural sphere of social and domestic influence which is her undisputed dominion, and her best equipment for exercising a moral sway over others, and she will, by so doing, acquire for her sex a true and lasting fame, and dispose even future generations to hold her memory sacred, and to call her blessed.

In appealing to women for the older and more

established view of feminine influence and duty, I would say, "Emulate the spirit and example of her whom we all esteem blessed, and who was so called by Divine sanction. Imitate her in faith, in virtue, in Christlike devotion. Learn from her lowly and unostentatious piety that 'Woman's mission is submission,' and that feminine rights are best secured through the sublimation and elevation of feminine character."

XIII.

Deborah and Jael.

JUDGES v. 7 R V.),

"The rulers ceased in Israel, they ceased, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel."

THE Old Testament Lessons for this season[1] open to us a whole gallery of historical portraits, chiefly female, including the most famous of the daughters of Israel—women whose words and deeds enter into the very thread and tissue of Jewish history; who, either themselves delivered their country from its oppressors, or by their influence, exerted in other ways, helped to mould and fashion the nation to which they belonged.

Among these Scripture heroines are Deborah, Jael, Esther, and Hannah. The two first, Deborah and Jael, were contemporaries, and they are linked together, not only as partners in the same events, but as possessing minds singularly in harmony up to a certain point. Historically,

[1] Early Sundays after Trinity.

Jael ranks with Deborah and Esther as one of the deliverers of Israel. Morally, she is to these noble women what the left-handed assassin, Ehud, was to Gideon, or Samuel. The terrible profanation of heroism to which she descended, in the cruel murder of Sisera, marks her out, at once, as a person of savage and criminal instincts, combined with much that was noble and good. Mrs. Beecher Stowe points out the same anomaly in her once famous book, "Uncle Tom's Cabin," where she describes a warm-hearted, but impulsive, Mulatto actually taking the life of her own infant son to save him from the curse of slavery, and offering, in her passionate, but undisciplined sense of justice, to rid her fellow-sufferers of their brutal owner, the terrible "Legree." It is a not uncommon characteristic of half-civilised races, that moral and immoral tendencies appear mingled with strange inconsistency in the same individual, or the same act. For where duties clash, it is often impossible for persons wholly untrained to distinguish between right and wrong, since they are incapable of estimating actions with any just or adequate sense of their true proportion.

Of Deborah, we know nothing but what is honourable and great, except it be her unqualified approval of Jael's deliverance. Her influence over Barak was altogether helpful and elevating. To the Israelitish general it gave

firmness, constancy, and faith. For Barak is distinctly referred to in the Epistle to the Hebrews as among the heroes of faith. It determined him in the espousal of a just cause, and the maintenance of a vigorous and righteous policy. It drew out the latent strength of a nature somewhat sluggish and undetermined, and stirred it into prompt action.

It was otherwise, we conceive, with Jael. Catching up the fierce and warlike spirit of Deborah, and twisting it to the execution of her own misguided purpose, like an instrument which slips in the hand of the operator, this impulsive child of nature broke away from all sense of honour and restraint, while she pursued, with passionate vindictiveness, what appeared to her the one desired object, namely, the destruction of Israel's powerful adversary and oppressor, the captain of Jabin's dreaded army.

In her twofold capacity of prophetess and ruler, Deborah possessed just the kind of influence most attractive to an imaginative and impulsive person like Jael. We still picture to ourselves her commanding figure, like Joan of Arc, or our own Elizabeth, at Tilbury, advancing at the head of her troops, which even a brave general like Barak refused to lead against the iron chariots of Sisera without her presence and protection—a woman of such commanding personality, and such indomitable courage, that she

inspired those who followed her with an absolute devotion to her cause, and with a blind faith which nothing could diminish or assail. We cannot doubt, however unconsciously exercised, that it was Deborah's magic influence that steeled the fierce and passionate heart of Jael for her hideous task. No one, it is true, prompted Jael to the dark and treacherous deed which she committed, a deed which, after all, had something of heroism in it. For under the circumstances which called it forth, and in the rude and lawless times in which it was perpetrated, it was partly excusable, and won for itself a tentative blessing even from the lips of Deborah herself. But while it was the offspring of her own dark and undisciplined nature, it was the inevitable construction which a person like Jael would naturally put upon acts and words such as those of the great prophetess. With a woman at the head of the army, nay, an inspired woman, the viceroy and representative of Jehovah, leading her soldiers in person, could *she* be wrong, in the same cause, and for the accomplishment of a great victory, to lay aside her womanhood, and defy the laws, both of honour and chivalry, of gentleness and truth? Would she not rather be carrying out the wishes of such a leader by putting "her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workman's hammer"? Surely, with such an end in view, she would be justified in

violating all natural instincts of hospitality or pity, even to playing the murderess in her own tent! We can well imagine Jael reasoning thus with herself. Hence, so far, and in this connection, we are not wrong, I think, to associate Deborah with Jael in her unwomanly deed. For though the former was in all respects blameless, and even noble, in her actions, yet her passionate enthusiasm was just what was needed to fire the too inflammable nature of the wife of Heber the Kenite. Jael acted, it is true, without the knowledge and consent of Deborah. At the same time, her act had Deborah's full approval. She was the ready instrument of her teaching, and though the murder of Sisera was a side issue, committed without her sanction or concurrence, yet it was none the less the inevitable consequence of her bold policy and daring leadership, upon a warped and disordered fancy. Many a serf in Russia, many a brigand in Italy, many a moonlighter in Ireland, has been guilty of deeds of a like character with those of the wife of Heber the Kenite, from motives as lofty, and convictions as mistaken as hers. The Boer women, in the late South African war, afford another example of the same courage and the same patriotism, combined with the same treachery that we meet with in Jael. As they stood side by side with their husbands in the trenches, how often has skill degenerated into

"slimness," and force into cruelty; while religious enthusiasm, and patriotism of a high order, have joined with ignorant prejudice and unconquerable hatred of their foes, to silence the voice of Reason in a brave people, and to urge forward an impossible war!

It is no uncommon thing for popular feeling to put a dangerous construction upon principles which are, in the main, just and right, and the danger increases if the principle itself is not quite "square," as we say, or is of doubtful application. It does not follow from this that if we ourselves act uprightly, we are always responsible for the effect which our words or actions have upon others. At the same time, if our teaching or conduct is open to misconstruction, we become, in a measure, responsible, and this ought to lead us to great care how we exercise an influence which may become injurious. History teems with examples of movements, social, political, religious, which had their root in some teaching, or example, of which they were the indirect fruit; while those who gave the teaching, or set the example, would have been horrified if they could have seen to what lengths their influence subsequently led.

From the story of Deborah and Jael, then, we draw some warnings, especially on the danger of unbridled enthusiasm. We usually think of enthusiasm as a special gift from heaven, as something almost divine. It lies at the root of all

great achievements. Nothing noble or great is ever carried on without it. I suppose that the greatest want of any age, at any period of that age, is the want of enthusiasm, in some form or other. And yet when you have got it, like fire, or electricity, or some mighty physical force, you will find it is a dangerous element, most difficult to control. It is no easy matter to create enthusiasm: it is even harder to direct or restrain it. Many a statesman, many a religious teacher, who has laboured to inspire others with his own enthusiasm, has discovered, when too late, that he was powerless to lay the spirit which he had evoked, or to control it within the limits of his own prudence, or his own belief. It was so with the leaders of the French Revolution; it was so with the destruction of the Temple, in the siege of Jerusalem by Titus; it is so in Church matters. Take a familiar instance: the two Wesleys, John and Charles, fellows of Lincoln College, Oxford, both clergymen of the Church of England, men of the deepest faith and spirituality, and actuated by the highest motives, created by their invincible earnestness and zeal, an astonishing religious revival in this country; and John Wesley, almost with his dying breath, exhorted his followers to cling to the Church to which they belonged. But some of the principles laid down by Wesley were not quite in accordance with the Church's order and teaching, and the result was that the enthusiasm

thus created carried the followers of Wesley beyond the limits of his own teaching and practice, and led them eventually to secede from the old Church, in which they were brought up, and to which they were bound by such sacred ties, to the great loss of themselves and of the Church from which they had seceded.

And what is true of the inspirers of popular movements in the Church or the State, is true also, in some degree, of the personal influence of private individuals. In every department of life, in the province of human friendship or human activity, it is possible for an influence, good and healthy in the main, to become injurious from one of three causes. Either it is associated with principles not quite sound, or it tends to extremes of thought and action, or it is of such a nature that it is liable to misconstruction. In any of these cases there comes a point where our enthusiasm, assimilated by minds warped and prejudiced, or weak and inconsiderate, may at once be turned into a new and dangerous channel. Deborah issues her manifesto, and Jael reads murder between the lines.

Religionists, educationists, leaders of thought or of fashion, all need a warning on this head: to guard the influences which are liable to misconstruction, to beware of that custom, or that teaching, which others may twist and abuse. The age is one which despises cautions. It is confident

and eager of experiments. If a thing is on the whole good, the common verdict is "Try it," regardless of consequences. But the history before us reminds us that our good may be distorted until it becomes evil, and that even the divine gift of enthusiasm has its dangers, its limits, and its snares.

XIV.

The Discipline of Sorrow.

RUTH i. 1-17.

"Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Beth-lehem-judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi. . . . And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons. And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years. And Mahlon and Chilion (Naomi's sons) died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband. Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread. Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah. And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother's house: the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me. The Lord grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept. And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people. And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters, . . . go your

way ; . . . for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me. And they lifted up their voice and wept again : and Orpah kissed her mother in law ; but Ruth clave unto her. And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods : return thou after thy sister in law. And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee : for whither though goest, I will go ; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge : thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried : the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me."

HERE is a story of a great domestic sorrow, just such a sorrow as may any day enter our own homes. Here were three women, three widows, partners in the same affliction. Each had suffered a similar bereavement, each had sustained the same loss. Yet observe how differently these women acted. One goes back to the world and tries to forget her sorrows. She returns to her friends, she mixes in society, she seeks to drown care in pleasure or dissipation, and so blot out the memory of the past. That is one way. The second adopts a course the very opposite of this. She hides from the world, she retires within herself, nurses her sorrow, and refuses to be comforted. She makes a companion of her grief, and learns to take a bitter and morbid pleasure in the recollection of her misery. "Call me not Naomi," she says, "call me Marah (bitterness), for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me." Here is another way. But a third still remains.

The true heroine neither selfishly makes light of her sorrows, nor selfishly magnifies them, but in kindly sympathy with others seeks the alleviation of her own sufferings, unconsciously acting out the spirit of that New Testament injunction: "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

It is often observed how differently people take their troubles. Some bear them patiently, while others chafe and fret under trial. Some are made better by sorrow, others are made worse.

It was so with these three women. Sorrow hardened Orpah, it made her selfish and indifferent, at any rate, it drew forth these traits in her character. No doubt they existed before, but trouble exposed and developed them. It had a different effect upon Naomi. Her mind it tended to sadden and embitter. She was in danger of becoming gloomy and morose. Thus, both Orpah and Naomi were made worse, or were in danger of being made worse, by sorrow. Ruth alone was made better by it.

Now these three women read us all a lesson upon the discipline of sorrow. For if we come to look into it, we shall find that most persons take their troubles in one or other of these three ways. Either they fly from sorrow and seek to forget it in some form of dissipation, or they brood over their affliction and nurse it in despair, or they alleviate their own sore by acts of kindly benevolence.

Sorrow must have an outlet. It will find vent for itself either in good deeds or in idle laments. And we ought, all of us, to pray that our sorrows may be sanctified to our soul's health. They are so when grace turns them into sympathies, when they teach us to feel for others, to interpret the wants of others, to pity the woes of others. If our hearts are enlarged, and not narrowed, by suffering, if it softens and humbles us, by opening our eyes to the misery which everywhere abounds in the world, then we are profiting by the discipline of sorrow.

It was thus our Lord Himself bare His griefs and carried His sorrows. He was the "Man of sorrows," "acquainted with grief" in all its phases. He was apprenticed to suffering. His whole life was full of it. He graduated in affliction, making it His study. There is not a sorrow with which we are familiar, but Christ felt and experienced it first. And how did He be bear His trials? By sharing those of others. In this respect Ruth deserved to be the ancestress of Jesus, for she shared His spirit as well as His pedigree.

But how few people learn the lessons which sorrow is intended to teach them! It is a much commoner temptation than we might suppose, to follow the example of Naomi, by giving way to the sullenness of grief, to let disappointment sour us, to sit down like a sulky child, and take pleasure in our pain. Many a kind heart is

embittered, and many a young life is clouded, by early sorrows in an uncongenial home. How many old people are not only irritable from physical infirmity, but permanently soured by repeated disappointment and long conflict with the world. Yet this was never, surely, the intention of our trials.

Perhaps, as a rule, women bear suffering better than men. We think so. It is a woman's share in the curse of our race. While men are called to labour, women are called to suffer. Nevertheless, women, as well as men, need the discipline of sorrow. It is a part of our lot, and there is no escape from it. "Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward." It is possible, no doubt, to overstate and exaggerate men's sorrows. Life is not all sorrow. Even the life of a Job, or a Jeremiah, has its joys. Even wicked men are not always miserable. Judas, we suppose, shared life's pleasures with the rest of the disciples, as he did its gifts and opportunities. But though it is possible to exaggerate our trials, yet it is even easier to under-rate the sorrows which exist in the world. You cannot enter a house where grief has not entered before you. We may close our eyes to the facts of the case, but beneath the smiling mask which Society wears there lurks many a hidden sorrow, which is eating the heart out, many a suffering soul that is weeping in private, and praying for a

little sympathy. We know nothing of the gloom and ennui, the bitterness and despair which are rankling in the bosoms of those whom we meet with day by day, in the great thoroughfares of life. It may be only now and again that a man is called to bear some crushing yoke which all the world can see, which marks him out from the rest of mankind, and signalizes him as "a man of sorrows." But no one altogether escapes. And few persons live to maturity without meeting with some special and definite trouble, besides which other trials are dwarfed in comparison. "The heart knoweth its own bitterness." Even youths and young women and little children have their sorrows, respecting which their elders are often strangely blind. Sorrows, which parents and sponsors can neither touch nor heal, to say nothing of the trials of men, whose heads are grey, and whose forms are bent with the weight of years.

There is no question of our having to meet trouble, the question is *how* we shall meet it. Let us pray that we may not miss the lesson of our sorrows when the trial comes. Every day we see men learning in the school of sorrow. For example, a father loses his only child, which nearly breaks his heart. Months or years elapse before he recovers from the shock, and people say of him, "Ah! He never got over his loss." And yet, the effect of the trial was this, that it both deepened his piety, and added to his usefulness. For

attaching himself to the work of the Church and giving himself up to ministering to the good of others, his private loss became a public gain; while for the child that he had lost, he received in return a spiritual family as his joy and crown.

Think not that I speak harshly or unfeelingly when I speak of the teaching, the discipline of sorrow. Believe me! there is comfort, solid comfort, in the thought that a Divine purpose lies concealed beneath each strange and crushing Providence: and the spirit of that purpose, like the mind of God Himself, is love.

In the words of one who had himself passed through heavy trials[1]: "Sanctified suffering mellows the character, and takes away that harshness and sourness under chastisement which are characteristic of the natural fruits of human anguish, substituting in their place, the sweetness of a ripened piety and submission to the will of God."

It may sound a humbling confession, but we do not know what is best for us. In the words of a distinguished prelate: "Ours would be a blind discipline of healing for sinful hearts. We should be poor physicians of our own maladies. And this is the reason why our Father in heaven uses a loving severity, and at times confounds our wishes with the strokes of His hand. He denies us what we ask, and sends instead what we most

[1] Canon S. Andrew (Tideswell).

recoil from. We ask for bright lights, and He sends us shadows ; we crave for soft things, and He sends us hardness for our portion ; we pray Him to take away our anxieties, and He turns them into present sorrows ; we ask for the allaying of some instant pain, and He sends us a double share ; we desire to be free from chastisement, and He besets us on all sides with His corrections, and He seems to read all our prayers backward, and to answer us by contradiction.

"Yet in all this, what is there but the order and harmony of the Wisdom and the Will of God? The confusion and perplexity is all our own. It is not that He contradicts our will, but we are contradicting His. We cross Him, not He us. We would be reigning in His Kingdom, and making His sway to follow our choice. We would be granters of our own petitions—make our will the law of His dealings with us. But He has His own purpose in all refusals, a purpose deeper than we can reach. It was an apostle and martyr that said : 'For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me ; and He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness,' and He Who gave that answer was even the same 'Who in the days of His flesh, offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that he feared' ; for 'though He

were a son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered.' "[1]

My friends, it is not pain that saves us, but the grace of Christ accompanying the pain; and we need all to pray that our sorrows may become our teachers, and work in us God's blessed end.

We have seen how sorrow tried Naomi and Ruth and Orpah, and what a different effect it had upon each. We have seen in their lives certain characteristics, slowly ripening to their fulfilment under the discipline of sorrow. Let us prepare ourselves by watchfulness and prayer, that we may be ready in the day when our trial comes. Let us ask that we may have grace to take it as God's chastisement, God's message to our souls. Then the clouds of life may lower, and the raindrops fall, but our curses shall be turned into blessings, and our sorrows into joys. May we cultivate such a spirit of dependence and trust, that those words which have proved a comfort to many, may be our own happy experience.

"Father, I know that all my life
  Is portioned out for me,
And the changes that will surely come
  I do not fear to see,
But I ask Thee for a present mind
  Intent on pleasing Thee."

H. E. Manning, in "Under the Cross."

"There are briers besetting every path
Which call for patient care;
There is a cross in every lot,
And a need for earnest prayer;
But a lowly heart that leans on Thee
Is happy anywhere."

A. L. Waring, from "Voices of Comfort."

XV.

An Idyll of Bethlehem.

RUTH i. 19, 20.

"So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and the women said, Is this Naomi? And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi (pleasant), call me Mara (bitter); for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me."

FROM the four short chapters which form the Book of Ruth, we obtain a glimpse at country life in Israel, during the times of the Judges. Apart from the natural beauty and pathos of the story, apart from its dramatic interest, and its delicate delineation of character, apart even from the moral lessons which it conveys, the Book is important from the graphic sketch which it presents of these early times, and the clear insight which it affords of the ordinary life of the people. It describes their laws and customs, their daily habits, social and religious, their dress and manners, not for the purpose of making

known these matters, but only because they must inevitably appear in a faithful history of individuals and families such as is here given. All the simple joys and sorrows which form the common lot of man are delineated with singular power and tenderness in this Book. It is like opening an old register in Bethlehem some two hundred and forty years before the birth of David, and as you turn over the brief record of weddings, and christenings, and funerals, having someone at hand to tell you how the people looked and dressed, what they thought and said, in fact, all about the simple lives of those whose names you find there.

The story commences with the migration of a single family to the neighbouring country of Moab. A migration caused by famine, the result probably of the unsettled times which drove so many poor Jews out of Palestine. The emigrants consist of a man and his wife and two sons. This little colony of Bethlehemites settle in Moab, where they remain ten years. Here, further troubles await them, including poverty and death. For the unsparing wind of adversity sweeps over this devoted family, chilling each one with its cold icy breath. It seems, indeed, almost as if sorrow was their hereditary lot. Again and again the pall is lifted, only to include another, and yet another under its mournful shade. At length, one only of the original emigrants

survives, the mother, who, left with her two daughters-in-law (now widowed like herself), is the sole relict of that little band, which ten years before had set out to seek their fortunes in a land apparently less burdened and disturbed than troubled Israel. Thus empty and desolate, like a hunted hare which turns in her distress towards the very spot from which "at first she flew," Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem, the place of her birth, carrying with her, as the sole companion of her sorrows, her daughter-in-law, Ruth, who, though a Moabitess, generously insists upon accompanying her, and absolutely refuses to leave her. Naomi gratefully accepts this unselfish decision. Indeed, the faithful friendship and clinging affection of Ruth form the one bright spot in her clouded life. But the sight of Bethlehem awakes a fresh outburst of painful recollections. In passionate self-abandonment of grief she enters her native village with a wail of sorrow. To the hearty welcome and sympathetic greetings of old friends she has but one reply, "Call me not Naomi (pleasant), call me Mara (bitter), for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty; why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?"

In a great sorrow we are always ready to regard our hour of bitterness as if it were un-

ending. To think that there can be no more gladness in store for us. To feel that the present represents the whole of life, and that the future must be all dark, because overshadowed by that one trouble. It was so with Naomi. She did not believe in the healing power of Time. She could not understand that God had in reserve for her rich stores both of usefulness and joy. Just when her troubles seemed to close in upon her and things became most hopeless and unbearable, a new life was opening out to her full of interest and of promise.

In parting with her husband and her sons, she naturally felt that she had buried her own happiness and affections, nay, that she had left the best part of herself in those three graves. It was quite natural for Naomi to think and feel thus. Most of us would have done so under the same distressing circumstances. Yet it was morbid and wrong for her thus to give way to the paralyzing effects of grief, and the first simple lesson which we learn from her story is to trust God for the future, even in what may seem the most hopeless circumstances. Life is not all cloud nor all sunshine. As years move on, troubles, which at the time seemed to fill our whole existence, dwindle into very small compass, and we ought not to let the blow rob us of our sense of duty, nor diminish in us our reserve of hope.

Hannah, the mother of Samuel, teaches us a similar lesson on the cure and conquest of sorrow. But the two are not identical, they present different aspects of the same thing. Hannah gives us the religious, Naomi the natural, antidote of sorrow. The one found relief for her trouble in prayer, the other in affection and in those common duties to which affection calls us. We ought, like Hannah, to seek consolation in prayer, *in* worship. But there is a still more elementary truth taught us in the Book of Ruth, which is sometimes disregarded: viz., that God has provided a cure for our troubles in the ordinary interests and occupations of life, if only we will throw ourselves into them, especially such as are in the domain of the affections. For this He has bestowed the gift of friendship, and made tender relationships between man and man. For this He has formed kindred and family ties, that through these ordinary channels our hearts and hands may be employed, and our faculties drawn out, so that we may find in these purely natural interests, both our duty and our consolation.

There is no doubt that Naomi's love for her daughter-in-law, Ruth, was the one link which bound this crushed and stricken woman to life. It lifted her out of herself and restored her to hope and happiness, in the joys and well-being of another. It substituted active duties for passive and useless regrets. It kept her from brooding

over the past. She had taken this lonely girl to her heart, and God had repaid her seven-fold into her bosom.

In the happy marriage of Ruth, and the birth of her infant son, who, as the grandfather of David, entered the royal line and became the progenitor of a long succession of Jewish kings, including the Saviour Himself, Naomi was more than blessed.

The story closes with a picture of the mother-in-law happy in this new affection, with Ruth's boy in her arms, satisfied that in this natural and necessary employment she had found a suitable and a sufficient mission.

"And Naomi took the child," we read, "and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it." Thus we are led on to see how a beautiful and pure affection between two women, unselfish on both sides, was employed by God in the ordinary ruling of Providence to bring light and comfort into a home, where two wounded hearts might easily have given way to the indolence of despair, satisfied merely to bewail their poverty, or mingle their regrets at misfortunes which were irretrievable.

There are some who may sneer at this simple Eastern story of a poor girl who gleans in the fields of a rich farmer and marries him; this old-world romance of a wedding and a christening, with the festivities which usually accompany these

family events. It is a woman's story throughout, full of tears and laughter. Woman's sentiment and woman's gossip forming a large element in the narrative. In its light touch, its delicate handling and exquisite tenderness, it might have been written by a woman. But there is nothing vulgar or commonplace in this story. It is a faithful and touching history of the toils and troubles of persons who moved in the humbler walks of life, where human joys are simplest, and men's sorrows have little to relieve them of their intrinsic bitterness. It tells how a good and noble woman was raised above the clouding memory of a threefold sorrow by the simple magic of affection.

In the moral nature of some people there is little recuperative power. When struck down by adversity, they lie where they fall, and make no attempt to rise. This is not the object of trial or sorrow. It was never intended that we should act thus. Well! Naomi was saved from this, by the instinct of duty and by the strength of affection. Hannah, by the warmth of her religious nature and by the power of prayer. While recognising the beauty of each, shall we not seek to combine the two? Let us beware of extolling religious enthusiasm when unaccompanied by moral worth, or of lauding practical goodness, if divorced from true piety. What we want is "to add to our faith, virtue," and to our virtue, faith.

In other words, to supplement practical duties and common-sense goodness, with those higher qualities of grace and worship, which are the token of a Christ-like disposition and the evidence of a saintly mind.

XVI.

A Pure Friendship.

RUTH i. 14.

"And Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her."

THE Book of Ruth is at once the story of a great sorrow and a pure and lasting friendship. If there is one thing more than another that tries friendship it is adversity. Let the cold wind of trial sweep across our path, or enter our home, and one inevitable result will be the dispersion of all false or fickle friends. At such times they quickly make their excuse and, one by one, take their leave of us.

Thus Ahithophel joins Absalom and Demas forsakes S. Paul. In the heyday of youth and prosperity friends multiply, but adversity tries them.

It was one of the credentials of Job's three friends that it was his misfortunes that drew them to his side. There was much that they lacked in

the way of sympathy and forbearance. They fell far short of perfect or ideal friends in their inability to understand him, and in their determination to read into his sorrows some fault of his own. They were altogether too wilful and too argumentative to be in any sense well qualified to administer consolation to a man broken down by a crushing misfortune. But they were true friends all the same. They did not fly from him when his fortunes changed, but sought him out in his grief and identified themselves with him.

It was the same with Ruth. It was misfortune which cemented the friendship between this Moabitish girl and her mother-in-law, and drew into closer union the tender bonds of affection. Like the friendship of David and Jonathan, it not only stood the test of adversity, but was warmed and strengthened by it.

I have before time dwelt upon the sorrows of Ruth and Naomi, but to-day I wish to speak of their friendship. It grew in an uncongenial soil, for few relations in life are less easy to fill with credit and affection than that of a daughter-in-law. It required as a first condition the renunciation of home and kindred. It meant banishment to a strange people and a strange land. It involved the adoption of new surroundings and a new faith. Ruth's friendship, however, stood every test to which it could be subjected: the test of time, the test of sorrow, the test of poverty.

There was no reciprocity of age to draw together these two women, only the bond of a common affection and the memory of a common grief; yet Ruth triumphed over every obstacle which stood in the way of her attachment to her mother-in-law.

Even Naomi's persuasive eloquence, urged in the girl's own interest, failed to shake her resolution, nor could it for one moment serve to part these two hearts so closely and so strongly knit together. In ringing tones of passionate appeal, her reply came back staunch and true—"Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee, for whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me."

How often, in our own times, would you find a poor country girl, a gleaner in the harvest field, expressing such a noble resolve in such noble words as these? And this took place more than three thousand years ago. Surely it proves to us how a lofty sentiment, the product of a noble mind, may out of its own nobility of feeling frame for itself a true and worthy expression.

It was not the outcome of secular education. It was the heart which spoke out of its own fulness, and the inward teacher was pure natural

affection coupled with warm religious faith. "The Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me." These words show that Ruth had already taken Naomi's God for her God ; and in so doing had cemented (as nothing else can) the eternal bond of religious friendship. You all know how this pure attachment between two holy women led to the future happiness of both. And how, in the good providence of God, this alien daughter of Moab was adopted into the chosen race through her unselfish devotion to her mother-in-law. For the Book of Ruth ends with a genealogical table, supplying an important branch of the genealogical tree of the House of David ; showing how Ruth, though not a Jewess, through her faith and virtue, was permitted to enter the royal line, and thus become a direct ancestress of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

These few verses containing the pedigree of David are like a leaf cut out of a family Bible, inserted into a more general narrative of family life, and they give to the book an historical, as well as a moral value.

In dwelling as we do at this season,[1] upon these Old Testament characters, we naturally connect Ruth and Hannah in our minds as similar in their genuine piety and warm-hearted devotion. In Hannah we have a lesson on the power of

[1] Early Sundays after Trinity.

faith, in Ruth on the power of friendship. Now friendships may be either natural or spiritual.

A purely natural friendship usually springs out of some reciprocity of taste or disposition which, acting like a tally, causes one mind to fit into and supplement another, to their mutual interest, edification and comfort.

A spiritual friendship adds to this natural reciprocity of taste, the bonds of a holy affection and a common belief, and no friendship can rise to its highest level, either of helpfulness or of enjoyment, which does not include in its experience these higher attributes of saintly communion and saintly joy. It was such which gave depth and sublimity to the friendships of David and Jonathan, of Ruth and Naomi, of our Lord and S. John. We know that He Who has consecrated all holy affections on the altar of His own perfect life has sanctified and endeared to us this gift of human friendship, by Himself sharing it with the beloved disciple and the little family at Bethany.

Can we forget that the evenings of His last week on earth were spent with Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, in the peaceful seclusion of their quiet village home? That it was here that the Saviour chose to make his own private preparation for the awful conflict of His Passion? And that the only earthly solace afforded Him, at this time,

was the consolation of friendship in the affection of these warm and true-hearted disciples?

Let me, then, suggest a few practical thoughts on this important subject of friendship. And let us remember first, that every good thing has its counterfeits. It is so with friendship. There are false friends, like Judas or Ahithophel, dangerous friends, like Ahab or Jonadab. Inconstant friends, like Saul, whose bitter persecution of David fills up so much of his history that we almost forget that he had once "loved him greatly;" and that these two men had formerly stood in the relation of friends. Only when the enthusiasm of the people (after the fall of Goliath) had brought David into direct competition with the king, did the flame of Saul's jealousy burst forth and consume all softer feelings. But without any such definite cause of separation, inconstancy is a common enough experience among friends. You meet them after a lapse of months or years and you find them changed. You cannot account for it, all you know is, that it is impossible to revive former interests. The old platform upon which you used to stand has somehow altered its position and slipped away from under your feet. Circumstances have changed and opinions have changed with them. It is as though a stream rolled between you and that one dear companion of former years, or, as if he who was once to you as a second self, now spoke in another tongue

which, even if understood, sounds strangely distant and foreign in your ears.

Then, there are disappointing friends, who somehow fail to fulfil the promise which their affection at first held out. Men who, while not unwilling to serve you, nevertheless always break down when their help or their sympathy is most needed.

Lastly, there are dangerous friends, who come between us and God, who depress the moral tone in us, or lower in our minds the standard of duty. Men who, by their silence, if not by their words, cast a doubt upon the holiest truths, in whose presence we seem to enter a chilling atmosphere of negations, a cynical world, whose influence serves to deaden, even where it does not destroy, all enthusiasm either for work or worship. Or these dangerous friends may be of another cast, who infuse into every pleasure an ingredient of vice: who are perpetually over-stepping the barrier between moderation and excess, and inviting us to follow them. To whom life has but one goal, self; and but one ideal, pleasure.

Such friends are to be eschewed as dangerous by every right-minded man. In contrast to these, Ruth and Naomi include all that we associate with what is beautiful and true in human friendship. Such an attachment, constant, unselfish ungrudging, concealed no hidden motives or ulterior designs. Indeed, it offered in Naomi to

relinquish the very thing which she most prized, viz., the companionship of her adopted daughter for that daughter's good. While in Ruth it clung to this same voluntary relationship for Naomi's sake.

Nor did it, as so many friendships do, allure its possessors into a region of emotion and fancy, or lift them above practical helpfulness through the exaltation of mere sentiment; but rather left them free to work out its own beneficent ends in the common duties of every-day life. What placed it most above ordinary friendships was this union of good sense with extraordinary devotion, combined with the fact that throughout it was warmed and strengthened by religious faith. For only in Christ can friendship rise to such a fervency of love or such a victory of patience. Only in His friendship can friendship be made perfect.

XVII.

Moral and Spiritual Gleanings.

RUTH ii. 19.

"Where hast thou gleaned to-day? And where wroughtest thou?"

THE question carries us back to an age remote from our own and to scenes and circumstances which differ widely from those in which our life is cast.

Before us is the harvest field of honest Boaz. The busy reapers are at their work, and the Eastern sun is shedding its rich warm glow over the golden fields. The oriental dress and primitive customs of the simple-minded people to whom we are introduced, strike us as strangely unfamiliar, presenting a strong contrast to the more prosaic and less picturesque habits of Western races. And yet, if we draw aside the drapery from the picture in which the Book of Ruth is framed, we trace the same great principles at work as those which animate and influence our own lives. We see a

kindly Providence ordering the ways and projects of men, continually re-shaping the changing factors of human destiny, adding here or there an apparent cypher to some unit of circumstance, and thereby multiplying the result tenfold; teaching us to read, even in the annals of strange names and stranger fortunes, that apostolic maxim, that "all things work together for good to them that love God."

And leaving the Divine side of the picture for the human, we see patience, fidelity, faith, in the crushed and gentle woman who, out of the greatness of her heart, and in the strength of her self-devotion, had adopted (without any compulsion save the promptings of duty and affection) the faith and fatherland of her bereaved mother-in-law. By bonds which even death could not sever, like sorrows and like sufferings had knit together in one, two natures most unlike—the Hebrew matron, Naomi, and her Moabitish daughter, Ruth.

"Intreat me not to leave thee," was the passionate decision of her clinging and constant mind. "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou dies't, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me."

We think, perhaps, of Ruth's later history, as

supplying an instance of the sudden turn of fortune. "God guided her steps," you say, and led her to the fields of Boaz, and put it into the heart of the generous and upright farmer to assist the widowed stranger who followed his gleaners and laboured through the long day for the support of her mother-in-law. But there was something more than good fortune attending the steps of Ruth. "God helps those who help themselves," is an old proverb. And Ruth was only reaping the natural consequence and fruit of her own piety and self-denial. She had passed through great and heavy trials. She had tasted, early in life, the cup of sorrow, and its bitter draught had only strengthened and matured her character. Had it been otherwise, she would have remained among her own people in the alien land of Moab. But she had cast in her lot with the chosen race. She had dared and sacrificed much for the sake of affection and principle, and in the success which awaited her she was but gleaning the natural fruits of her faith and patience.

Thus, we who can read the sequel of her life, and can look back along the lines of doubt and sorrow to the decision of her early days, place her foremost in that holy band who sow in tears and reap in joy, who travail in pain and rest in peace; who begin with toil and end with victory. Whether we study the human or the divine aspect of this picturesque story, this touching biography of a

great and noble woman, we learn lessons which should arm us with faith and fortitude, as we prepare again to enter upon the duties, the conflicts, the decisions of a New Year, with its untried and unknown future before us. Whatever the world may think or say about good fortune, however strongly it may be urged that in the lower departments of life circumstance is the chief ruler and disposer of events, we have the actual promise and pledge of our Heavenly Father, that to those who lean on His Almighty arm, and commit their souls to His protective care and keeping, there is absolute safety. "Chance" does not, at any rate, enter into the domain of our spiritual life. For there is a power in the hand of God, which is continually bringing good out of evil in a way that we can neither foresee nor understand. Nay, He has made it a law of our being, that there is a helpful and curative property in all evil, if only we are willing to learn the lessons which our misfortunes are intended to teach us. Thus, to the saint of God, the stumbling-stones of trial become stepping-stones to holiness. The way of victory is the way of the Cross. And there is positively no combination of circumstances, however appalling, and no injury however serious, that can touch the centre of our being, if only our trust in God remains unshaken. Is not this a truth from which we may derive strength and comfort for the New Year?

Men talk about "accident." You have only to enter the wards of one of our great hospitals, to see hundreds of beds occupied by patients who are the victims of accident. What do we mean by accident? If we mean something which happens without our knowledge or control, and contrary to our expectation, then we are quite right to call it an accident. But if we mean that it happened by "chance," then we make a great mistake, for nothing happens by chance. Speaking correctly, then, there is no such thing as accident. It has been well said, "The chapter of accidents is the Bible of the Fool." And when a man is carried to the hospital in consequence of an accident, as we call it, we should never forget that there was a definite intention in the mind of God Who permitted it, and we ought to ask ourselves what that intention is. For whether the issue be death, or a temporary illness, or a lasting injury to the mind or the body, behind these purely physical results there lies the moral purpose of God. This is so, even if the accident was caused by our own carelessness or sin. We may still assure ourselves that it was not a "chance" that happened, rather was it God's purpose, and therefore, if only we could see it, it must have have been a good purpose. Now there is a text of scripture which explains this. In Hebrews xii. 9, 10, we read, "Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us . . . who chastened us after

their own pleasure; but He" (the great Father) "for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness."

It is most important for us to realise that this great spiritual intention, this beneficent desire of the Lord and Father of our spirits, underlies every form of earthly ill. Eliminate that intention, and you leave the pain or the sickness, the cruelty or the loss in all its natural hideousness, unrelieved by any extenuating fact. It is then, terrible, overwhelming! But if you invest it with the moral purpose of God, even if your own fault or your own folly be the cause of the evil which has overtaken you, immediately that which before was hopeless and irremediable acquires a voice and message; at least it is a call to repentance, to humiliation and contrition. Hence a beneficent meaning is infused into the trial. It may yet be included among the things which "work together for good."

Thus to the man who is on God's side, who is a fellow-worker with God, no ill can really come. For, the purpose of God in the trial, or the discipline, being taken for the purpose of the man himself, and made his own, it is necessarily the higher end which is fulfilled. The thorn in the flesh becomes a sanctifying discipline, the cup of sorrow a refreshing draught, the heated furnace a purifying flame. What confidence such a belief must impart to the man who can really claim it

for his own. As we cross the narrow line which separates the past from the future, to enter those untried paths which lie beyond, whose heart does not palpitate when he remembers how many unseen perils await him behind the rising hill, which hides from view the coming day, the coming year? Which of us has not some treasure in his home, or in his heart, some darling project or supreme affection, the renunciation of which, if evil befall it, would cloud his life with anguish and bring down his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave? How dare we trust ourselves alone upon the stormy sea of uncertainty without the conscious pressure of a Father's hand—without first placing our treasure, whatever it is, in His Almighty care and keeping?

Well, the first lesson that we learn from the biography of Ruth, is faith in a Divine Helper. Trust, implicit trust in the Divine protection. The next lesson is to do the simple right, as she did, and leave the rest to God. What dignity there is in a noble, upright life! It matters not what our station or position may be. It is not that which ensures a fragrant memory and an honoured grave. It is life itself that is dignified, not the circumstances which surround it. It is the mind and person of a monarch that is kingly, and not the crown he wears. David was as great feeding his father's sheep, or hurling his sling at the Philistine giant, or playing his harp to dispel

Saul's madness, as he was commanding the armies of Israel. Ruth was as great in her dignified poverty as in her subsequent position of ease and comfort. S. Paul was as great in the cell of his Roman prison, chained to a soldier, as he was addressing the Athenian philosophers on Mars Hill.

If we have got such elements of character as Ruth possessed, coupled with a simple childlike faith in God, then there is nothing the New Year can bring to harm or hinder us, beyond some temporary hardships, sweetened by the love of God.

One word of appeal. Those simple words of Naomi to Ruth, which I have taken for my text, have a New Year's message for each of us. "Where hast thou gleaned to-day? and where wroughtest thou?" We are all gleaners, gathering for the days and years store for the future. In what department of our life have we been most successful? Where are our chief energies directed? Where is the field of our operations? Are we content, as we glean among the sheaves to reap a crop of worldly advantage only? to amass a fortune? to lay by an independency? To store up secular knowledge while we neglect that which is Divine? To acquire great and noble sentiments which have nevertheless no influence on our life and character? What is the proportion of our moral and spiritual gleanings to those of a material nature?

These are solemn questions! for it is possible to be active, industrious, painstaking, in what we do, and yet to decline even to enter the field which should be the first that the spiritual gleaner should choose.

The church bells have rung out the old year and rung in the new one. The days are speeding fast. Another year has gone, leaving its mark upon our character for good or ill. The gleaners' work will soon be ended, and the harvest of life completed. While wishing you all prosperity in the coming year, and every true blessing in your hearts, your homes, your families, let me leave with you this question of the past and the present, as one deserving a thoughtful and prayerful answer:

"Where hast thou gleaned to-day? and where wroughtest thou?"

XVIII.

Prayer and Sacrifice.

1 SAMUEL i. 27, 28.

"For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of Him: therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord."

THE character of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, is unfolded to us in six acts. Her sorrow, her prayer, her vow, her joy, her thanksgiving, and her offering.

Take first, her sorrow. In its specific nature, Hannah's sorrow cannot happily find a counterpart in any English home. Yet we fear that even English homes are not exempt from sorrows nearly allied to hers. For speaking in general terms, Hannah's sorrow was due to two things, the unkindness of relatives and a blank in her own affections. In other words, the misery of her home surroundings and the burden of a desolate heart. And these still point to sorrows which are common enough in our own times, for except in

the case of some very ambitious person, whose interests lie altogether outside the domestic circle, our chief sorrows (especially in the case of a woman), are generally centred in the home.

We boast of our English homes, we sing our national "Home, sweet Home," and it would scarcely be asserting too much to say that the happiness and prosperity of the nation are bound up in that word "Home." And yet, if these English homes of ours were unveiled, if the sins and sorrows of home life could be exposed, it would sicken and appal us to discover how much misery lies hidden there. What selfishness and cruelty, what treachery and deceit, what oppression and injustice, still exercise their sway over the weaker natures, through the capricious tyranny of some stronger will, to say nothing of those grosser sins whose shadows sometimes enter and darken even so-called Christian homes!

Respectability has thrown a gilded cloak over our home life, but beneath its ample folds are hearts pining for affection and souls wearied with the perpetual teasing and fretting of little daily unkindnesses and provocations, the sum of which makes life scarcely worth the living.

We may close our eyes to the heart sickness and ennui, the bitterness and despair, that lurk beneath the smiling mask which Society wears, but these things are no trifles; they count as real troubles, and take a first place among the serious

trials of life. So then, Hannah's sorrow may have lessons for ourselves.

I have already said that her sorrow consisted chiefly in the fact that she had an unhappy home and a desolate heart. What did she do? She took her home sorrow and her heart's bitterness to God, she sought relief in prayer. Though alone in her grief, without a friend upon whose sympathy and advice she could lean; though her rival mocked her, and her husband failed to understand her, and the high priest Eli misjudged and rebuked her; yet she persevered and carried her trouble to God. Like Hezekiah, with the letter of Sennacherib in his hand, she laid it before the Lord, and God granted her petition. But long before He had granted it, the burden of her sorrow was removed.

Learn, then, by Hannah's example, to cast your burden upon the Lord. Leave it with Him, and He will bear both it and you. The lesson of Hannah's sorrow is that it led her to pray, it led her to God. Her sorrow was a very sharp and real one, yet she did not seek to escape from it by cowardly or unlawful expedients. She did not sit down in sullen, passive despair, nor seek (as some do) to drown care in pleasure or excitement. She did not fly from her miserable home with its sad routine of painful duty, as Hagar fled from a trying position under similar circumstances; but she opened her grief to God;

she cast her burden upon the Lord, and He sustained her. And whoever would share Hannah's reward and find a corresponding relief, must go and do likewise.

But now, turn to Hannah's prayer. She prayed for a son, similarly Zacharias, the father of S. John the Baptist, prayed for a son, for at the annunciation of his birth, the angel Gabriel began his message with the words, "Fear not, Zacharias, for thy prayer is heard." And these two boys whose births were in answer to prayer, not only grew up to be good and great men, but each occupied a unique position in the Church of God. The one inaugurated the prophetic era, the other ushered in the Christian era. The one was the first, the other the last, of the old prophets.

Samuel, like S. John the Baptist, stood upon the confines of two great historical periods. He was the forerunner of the first Jewish king, whom he anointed, as John was the forerunner of the last and greatest Jewish King, whom he baptized. And this peculiar honour was reserved for these two men, who were respectively the fruit, the one of a Jewish mother's, the other of a Jewish father's, prayers. So God honours prayer. But we are sometimes told that prayer for natural gifts is presumptuous. "You may pray," it is said, "for moral but not for natural gifts." The distinction is certainly unscriptural and as it limits prayer,

so it dishonours God. For whatever tends to curtail the natural outpouring of a heart's desires to God, must be wrong. He who gave us the model prayer, taught us to say in one breath, "Give us this day our daily bread," and, "Forgive us our sins," putting side by side the prayer for forgiveness, and the prayer for our necessary food. Yet there is no doubt an element of truth in the objection raised against prayer for natural gifts; and a little consideration will, I think, enable us to estimate the force of the objection, and to answer it. Scripture teaches us that God always deals with us as with children. As children, then, we should ask for what we desire, with a child's trust if with a child's ignorance, too. But a petition which is beautiful from the lips of a child would often be repulsive from the lips of a man. In other words our growth in knowledge does tend in some directions to limit our prayers. A youth will naturally cease to ask his father for many things which he freely asked for when a child; and an increase in knowledge since the days of Hannah and Zacharias, while it serves to widen the field of prayer in some directions, also narrows it in other directions. Thus a knowledge of science (which is only another name for knowledge of the works and ways of God) will tend to make it ridiculous, and therefore wrong, for us to pray for some things which in days gone by we should have felt it right to pray for.

But this modification of the terms of prayer, by our growth in knowledge, is a very different thing from the hard and fast rule that it is only right to pray for moral gifts or spiritual blessings. If our prayer is guarded by the two provisos which Christ Himself hath taught us, "If thou wilt," and "If it be possible," I have no hesitation in saying that it is right in the twentieth century, as in the first century, to pray for natural as well as moral gifts. And we are no more debarred than Jewish Hannah or Jewish Zacharias, from asking a blessing on our homes, our circumstances and families, except so far as the prayer is limited by these two provisos. Even for Christian parents, then, Hannah's petition stands forth in all its native worth, as an example of simple faith answered and rewarded. But there is one thought more in connection with this pious mother's prayer. It is that she received, as we all receive, more than we ask. She asked a son, but Samuel was only an earnest of the blessings bestowed upon her. God's gifts continually overstep our petitions; since He is "always more ready to hear than we to pray, and is wont to give more than either we desire or deserve."

But consider next Hannah's vow. It has been observed with respect to Jacob's prayer at Bethel, that it was most characteristic of the mind and feelings of a Jew. It reads like a

commercial transaction: the bargaining tone, the commercial spirit enter into his very prayers. We notice the same peculiarity in Hannah's prayer. She accompanies it with a vow. "If thou wilt give me a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head." He was to be a Nazarite from his birth. Now we admit there may be something characteristically Jewish in these prayers of Jacob's and Hannah's, which seem to make a bargain with God: but we think that we perceive in them also a deeper principle—a principle which, if it be somewhat harshly expressed is, nevertheless, truly human, and underlies every real heartfelt utterance of the soul to God. I mean the connection of prayer with the thought of sacrifice. What does that familiar ending to the Church Collects, "Through Jesus Christ our Lord," point to but to prayer offered through the merits of a sacrifice? And do we not need also, as a proof of our sincerity, that our prayers should be connected with a sacrifice on our own part? It is not then only Jewish but human, and not only human but Christian, to enter into covenant, to make a contract with God; to connect prayer with sacrifice; asking with serving; receiving with giving. For there is a true and essential connection between the faith which asks, and the love which responds; since in some form all true prayer implies a definite and corres-

ponding sacrifice; while each fresh gift received, lays us under an obligation to further consecration.

But consider next Hannah's joy. After her prayer we read: "So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad." As soon as she rose from her knees her sorrow vanished. Long before her prayer was answered in the birth of Samuel, it was answered in the relief to her own mind. She returned to her home, "and was no more sad." And yet the home had not changed. Her duties were the same; Elkanah was the same; Peninnah was the same; everything was just as she had left it. But Hannah was not the same: because prayer had brought hope into her soul, and though the originating cause of her sorrow remained, the sorrow itself was gone. Such is the victory of mind over circumstance: such is the triumph of faith in the heart. We see here the efficacy of prayer. Not because it always or immediately removes the physical cause of our sufferings, but because it alleviates the mental sore. And like Hannah we return to the same work, the same home, the same circumstances, to rejoice and be no more sad.

But once more consider Hannah's thanksgiving. For wise reasons women are prohibited in Holy Scripture from public teaching in the Christian Church. They were permitted however to teach by contributing to the Holy Scriptures

themselves. And as they are nowhere prohibited from singing in churches, so their contribution to the inspired writings have been chiefly in the shape of religious hymns. We have three of these noble productions in the Bible, the authorship of which is certain. The song of Deborah, the song of Hannah, the song of Mary. Each of these is a Psalm or song of triumph. Each contains much that is beautiful and instructive. But they are in ascending order of spirituality and Christian feeling. Mary's alone rises to the rank of a Christian hymn. The practical lesson, however, which is taught by Hannah's song, is that religious joy must find an expression for itself in some form of praise or thanksgiving, that as sanctified sorrow leads us to God in prayer, so sanctified joy will lead us to God in praise. The heart must utter what it feels; and when the hopes and affections are turned Godwards, whether our sorrows are enlarged or our spirit rejoices, it will alike lead us to fresh interviews with God our Saviour. Hannah's thankfulness was shown in a twofold offering: in the fruit of her lips and the fruit of her life. It included the sentiment of Mary and the service of Martha: the pious gift of praise, and the practical gift of her first-born son. Let us not think that we have given all when we have given thanks; nor done all when we have done our duty. But, like Hannah, let us mingle heartfelt thanks with

earnest effort. And this leads us to the consideration of Hannah's offering. Never was faith more conspicuous than in this pious mother's consecration of her boy. It was a rehearsal of Abraham's gift of Isaac, and of God the Father's gift of God the Son. When a childless wife she had prayed for a son, and yet in that very prayer she offered him to the Lord. The gift after all was not for herself. She desired a blessing only that she might re-dedicate it to God. Doubly hers was the gift thus consecrated to the Giver. The terms in which she expresses her decision, exhibit a faith such as few Christian mothers attain to. Her own words are: "For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of Him: therefore also I have lent him unto the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord."

Observe the exact terms of consecration. "I have lent him to the Lord." Samuel was a loan which she hoped at some future time to receive back again. Yet not in this life clearly: for she had lent him to God "all the days of his life." It was in a future life, then, that she trusted to receive again the loan thus lent to the Lord. Could human faith rise higher? How few trust God thus far. This Jewish mother's faith was like that of the Patriarchs who dwelt in the land of Promise, while they possessed not a foot of its soil; satisfied that for them the

promise pointed to a "better and an enduring substance."

We learn, then, from Hannah's offering that the real touchstone of our sincerity is self-sacrifice. The strength of a man's character is always measured, not by his prayers, but by his sacrifices. Take the case of Abraham. We think of Abraham's intercession for Sodom, and we feel at once that in the wonderful prayer offered up, we have evidence of a marvellous faith and great nobility of mind. Yet it was not the prayer for Sodom, but the sacrifice of Isaac, which formed the crowning act of Abraham's heroism, which earned for him the title "Father of the faithful," and placed him almost on the pinnacle of human excellence. What to us would Daniel's prayer have been, as an indication of character, had it been unaccompanied with the sacrifice which that prayer involved? Or to take a higher example still. How little would even our Saviour's agony in the garden have meant, had it been other than the prelude to what followed. Every true prayer is connected with some form of sacrifice. And that is perhaps one reason why so many prayers are of little worth. It is because they are unconnected with any form of sacrifice. May we never forget that He who said, "Ask, and it shall be given unto you," said also, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself." Religion is incomplete if it has

not these two sides. It offers much to us, it also demands something from us.

We have considered very briefly the chief lessons taught us by the life of Hannah. We have heard how in her sorrow she did not mourn and forget to pray, nor vow and forget to pay, nor receive and forget to render thanks; and therefore her sorrow, her prayer, her vow, her thanksgiving, and her offering, are all instructive. May the Holy Ghost the Comforter lead all mourners to a like faith, a like devotion, and a like reward.

XIX.

An Ideal Worshipper.

1 Samuel i. 12.

"She continued praying before the Lord."

The story of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, is too well known to need recapitulation. It is the story of one whose surroundings were most trying and injurious, and whose life was clouded with a great sorrow. While Hannah's religious privileges were of the scantiest, her home life was well-nigh intolerable. Her husband alone was kind to her. As a childless wife, with a pitiless rival ever at hand to goad and torment her, she experienced both the loneliness and bitterness of domestic infelicity. But this only threw her more unreservedly on the help of Almighty God. Her trouble taught her the power and privilege of prayer and the consolation of religion. We think of Hannah, then, as an example of one, who, by her own faith and nobility, rose above her surroundings.

How few people, unassisted, are like her in this. Many, as if run in a mould, are altogether dependent on their circumstances and training. The habits and opinions of their class, the beliefs and prejudices of their times, measure, as by rule, both their practice and their convictions. Girded as with unyielding bands of iron, these ultimately decide for them, not only their usefulness in this life, but their portion also in that which is to come. Hannah, on the contrary, showed herself, both in her home and religious life, superior to the times in which she lived. Even under the evil conditions of polygamy she has left us a bright picture of maternity. Though unappreciated and misunderstood (things hardest of all to a woman), she rose above the crushing influences of her lot. And so completely did she triumph over the limiting conditions of circumstance, that she actually appears before us (so far as Jewish history is concerned), as the ideal worshipper, no less than the ideal mother of pre-Christian times.

The Jewish religion, at this period, had suffered serious decadence. It contained much that was becoming obsolete and unfitted for the age. Like the rude Tabernacle at Shiloh, half tent and half Temple, it combined in its structure, enduring elements with those which were fading and ready to vanish away. But it was not this so much as the personal degradation of its priesthood in

the family of Eli, which repelled true worshippers and acted as a deterrent to religion. For a depraved priesthood will ever lead to a deserted Temple. Could anything be more depressing to a devout mind than a Temple served as that at Shiloh, with palsied feebleness on the one hand, and unblushing profanity on the other. That kneeling figure, however, that silent, sorrowful woman (a solitary worshipper at one of the yearly festivals), was destined, through the power and earnestness of her supplication, to change all this —the order of the priesthood as well as the careless and perfunctory character of the Temple services. Through the instrumentality of her future son, Hannah's petition led to the widest reforms. For it not only introduced an important educational movement in the establishment of schools or colleges for prophets, but led also to a wise combination of the priestly and prophetic order, such as is a distinct feature in our own Church of England.

Hannah's is the first mention we have of silent prayer in the Bible. And so strange did it appear to the perceptions and blundering incapacity of the aged priest, Eli, that he actually mistook and reproved this evidence of a nobler ideal, and a deeper spirituality.

Men sometimes complain of the churches they attend. If the teaching is not according to their fancy, if the sermon is long or the music

unattractive, they absent themselves from public worship, on these or even more trivial grounds. But where is there a parish church with such paralyzing conditions as those of the Temple at Shiloh? God had all but deserted it. There "was no open vision." The feebleness of the presiding head, the high-handed violence, the coarse and open profligacy of the assistant priests, caused men to "abhor the offering of the Lord." For even people who are themselves bad, whose tone, at any rate, is worldly, and whose motives are none of the highest, look for something better in their clergy. Yet it was there at Shiloh that Hannah, rebuffed and misinterpreted, carried her needs to the great Father, and won a blessing on her home and life, a blessing which so expanded and overflowed that it ultimately reached to a revival of that very worship which she had found so uninspiring, and a restoration of that very Temple, which morally and spiritually, as well as materially, was a crumbling ruin.

In considering the example of Hannah, we find that no single element of true worship was wanting in the religious attitude of this noble woman. In her vow, her prayer, her thanksgiving and her offering, we have a very compendium of worship, a Liturgy in act. We think of Hannah as one of the contributors to the Church's Book of Psalms. If Miriam, "Mary" (the first in Jewish history who bare the name most honoured

among women), put words to a popular outburst of national feeling, as she led forth the Jewish maidens with timbrels and dances on the shore of the Red Sea, if Deborah chronicled her victories over the hosts of Sisera in a national song of triumph, so, in like manner, Hannah's religious feeling found expression for itself in this gem of sacred poetry, this Old Testament *Magnificat* of praise and thanksgiving. But it is not only in the matter of her song that we compare her with S. Mary the Virgin, but in other respects also we note a striking correspondence between Hannah and the Mother of our Lord, especially in the presentation and dedication of her son, and in the utter self-abnegation which his early consecration demanded.

Rispah, the daughter of Aiah, has sometimes been compared to Mary at the Cross. There, prostrated in grief and affection before the seven rude gibbets on which her two sons and five others were crucified, this heroic woman actually watched, week after week, beside the dead, from spring until autumn, suffering neither the birds of the air by day, nor the beasts of the field by night, to alight on her sacred charge. It was an act of faithful and startling devotion. Yet it is Hannah rather than Rispah whom we think of as the Madonna of the Old Testament, who, in her absolute self-sacrifice, both in the education and consecration of her son, holds up an almost

perfect ideal and shows us maternity fulfilling its divine mission in the Church and the world.

By this act of consecration Hannah proved her thankfulness. This she had already expressed, both in the hymn which she composed, and in the name "Samuel" given to her boy, which means "asked of God." Many people would have been satisfied thus to express their gratitude without any further offering, just as English mothers will go once to church after the birth of a child and join in a special service of thanksgiving provided for their use, and then, for years, it may be, never enter a church again. Surely, that is a poor way of showing our thankfulness to Almighty God. To act thus is little better than mocking our Maker. Of what use is it that we should say our thanksgiving once, and then leave God out of our lives altogether, never making Him any return, not even to the extent of showing our sense of His goodness by offering Him our homage and worship in His house of prayer and praise? In the poorer parishes of East London it is no uncommon sight to see poor mothers of the lowest class coming to church in their ordinary work-day clothes (with shawls over their heads), to use the Church's office of thanksgiving after a birth. Women, I mean, who never come at any other time, except it be to a midnight service on New Year's Eve. We liked to see them come, but you could hardly regard it

as a religious act, it was done in pure superstition, and though excusable in these poor ignorant women living in the slums, yet it ought to be different elsewhere. There are many in the country, however, who act in the same way.

That we ought to present to God something better than this, is taught us in that very service to which I have alluded, where it is provided that an offering should always be made either to the church or to the poor. This emphasizes the principle that our thanksgiving should not be in word only, but in deed and in truth.

Well! Hannah made such an offering. She was not content merely to express her thankfulness in the name which she gave to her boy, nor to embody it in a special Psalm composed for that purpose, but she added to this the offering of regular and devout worship, and, at immense sacrifice to her own feelings, she crowned the gift by the dedication of her son to the service and work of the Sanctuary. Following her example, all mothers may be regular worshippers in God's House of Prayer. They may present their children to God in Baptism and Confirmation, and, if Providence opens out a way, by dedicating their sons to the sacred ministry of the Church.

I might draw many lessons from the simple unostentatious piety and influential goodness of this remarkable woman, but I will only mark

these two; that she affords a lofty ideal of maternity regarded as a distinct mission in the Church and the world, and at the same time sets an example of worship such as few attain to. While we think of Hannah then as the ideal mother, we may also think of her as the ideal worshipper, winning by her unceasing intercession a blessing for the Church and people to which she belonged. From Hannah's influence we learn that when a church is not altogether to our liking, when a parish is defective in its ministry or its management, it is often in the power of a congregation to reform it. Not by opposition, nor by making its deficiencies an excuse for neglect, but by warm interest and hearty co-operation. In other words, by its offerings and its prayers. Hannah did not stay away from Shiloh because its Temple was badly served; she continued to give it her presence and support. Following her steps, sharing her spirit, we shall help to uphold what is tottering, and strengthen what is weak, to the honour of Him Who has called us to a ministry in His Church, and a place in His Kingdom.

XX.

The Deliverance of Esther.

ESTHER iv. 15, 16.

"Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer. Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish."

THE story of Esther is a story of the Persian court, some four hundred and eighty years before the Christian era. Full of dramatic interest, it turns upon a plot instigated against the poor captive Jews in Persia, by one Haman, a wicked courtier, who, from motives of jealousy and private animosity, had obtained an edict from the king, authorising the complete destruction of the Jews in Persia. This diabolical plot is frustrated however by the heroic conduct of Esther, a Jewish maiden, whom Xerxes, or Ahasuerus, had made his queen. Braving the wrath of the king by

entering his presence uninvited, she boldly presents her petition and asks for a revocation of the royal edict, imperilling her own life, by thus pleading for the lives of her people. Steeling herself for the task and for the terrible risk which she runs, in the words, "If I perish, I perish," she cheerfully expresses her determination to win or die in the cause.

The king, however, stretches out his royal sceptre, grants Queen Esther's request, and thus secures the deliverance for which she has imperilled her throne and her life.

Thoroughly oriental in its character, the whole narrative reads like a fairy tale, in which Esther, the heroine of truth and virtue, rises through the charm of her beauty, and the simple power of her goodness, to be Xerxes' queen, in which exalted position, through her influence with the king, she is enabled to thwart the wicked machinations of Haman, and win for the Jews a great deliverance. The dramatic power of the story is added to by the fact that this Haman, the bitter enemy of Mordecai, Esther's cousin, was an Agagite of the race of Amalec, one of the aboriginal races of Canaan, whom Saul was commissioned to slay. By an act of flagrant disobedience, however, Saul foolishly spared the Amalekites, in consequence of which twice in the history of the chosen people descendants of this unexterminated race unexpectedly appear to

wreak their vengeance on their former enemies, the Jews.

The Book of Esther is historically interesting, as giving the inner life of the court of Xerxes, while at the same time it illustrates how great an influence the captive Jews, in the days of their exile, exerted over the heathen races among whom they dwelt. Morally, it is useful, not only because it reminds us how in every age and circumstance, under conditions the most adverse, goodness will assert itself, and God will protect His own, but also because it teaches how the consecration of natural gifts and endowments may redound to His honour and glory.

Esther's defeat of Haman's wicked plot naturally forms the substance of the story which chronicles her life. It was inevitable that some record of Esther, the Jewess, who became a queen of Persia, should be written and included among the sacred archives of the race, especially when we bear in mind in what reverence her name was afterwards held, resulting in the institution of a yearly feast in her honour, the Feast of Purim, which became a national festival amongst the Jews, in commemoration of her deliverance.

The story of Queen Esther then, is the story of the noble deeds of a noble woman. Now women reflect the times in which they live, even more faithfully perhaps than do men, because of their quicker perceptions and more impressionable

natures, and also because they have more to do with social life than the other sex, and are more jealous of its conventions. They mirror the age in which their lot is cast, and present it to us, both in its strength and its weakness, in a way impossible to ourselves. As an example, if we had no other evidence of the wild and lawless times, in which the Judges ruled, we should have this evidence in the bold character of Deborah, or the rough justice and rash patriotism of Jael. In the same way, we obtain from the Book of Esther, a far more intimate knowledge of the adulations and flatteries, the crimes and corruptions of an Eastern court, than we do from the Book of Nehemiah, or even from the Book of Daniel. As I have said the story is thoroughly oriental in its character. It is a tale of intrigues and stratagems. All that was corrupt in a licentious Eastern city is to be found in it. It is a picture of indolence and luxury, of cruelty and fraud; where false codes of honour, and lax systems of justice abound; where the splendour of the great acquires its magnificence out of the poverty and suffering of the poor; where human life is sacrificed as water to gratify a passing wish; where the poison that lurks amid the fairest flowers which bloom under a tropical sun, is not more deadly in its nature than the poison which infects the whole moral life of Shushan, the Persian capital. Into such a hot-bed of vice and temptation was the

beautiful slave girl Esther cast as an orphan, with no one to guard her steps or protect her interests save a cousin, one "Mordecai," a descendant of the poor captive Jews whom in the days of Jehoiachin, Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive into Babylon. It might be supposed that something more definite would be told us respecting Esther's religious faith and convictions. Only one allusion, however, is made to her piety; where it is recorded that before entering the presence of the king, unbidden, to make request for her people, she asks their intercessions in a three days' fast, which she herself joins in with her attendant slaves. It does not enter into the plan and scope of the Book to disclose more than this, for the Book of Esther is the most secular Book in the Bible. The name of God never enters it. Its chief object (from a religious point of view) is to show how even natural gifts may be employed by God to minister to the most important issues, when they are strengthened by noble purposes and a pure conscience. Thus Esther is not put before us like Hannah as a model of prayer, or like Deborah as a heroine of faith, though she was certainly not destitute of these adjuncts to virtue. An orphan and a slave, dowered with that most dazzling and most dangerous of all gifts to one in her position, the gift of extraordinary beauty, she yet used this flattering and seductive attribute as only a good

woman can use it, as an influence over others for good. We know that she was pure and innocent amidst prevailing corruption. We know that she showed the most filial devotion to her only near relative who acted as her foster-father. We know that she possessed courage of a high order and that she was moved by feelings of warm and glowing patriotism. We know too, that she had a wise and understanding heart, from the way in which she planned and carried out her difficult and trying commission. Under these circumstances can we think or speak otherwise of her than as good Queen Esther?

But beneath the outward facts contained in the story, we see the secret workings of Providence, carrying into these centres of heathen idolatry and heathen corruption the knowledge of the true God. Just as elsewhere we see Joseph in Egypt and Daniel in Babylon, fulfilling in turn, the same all-wise purpose towards other kingdoms and peoples of the East. Among these captive missionaries was Daniel, who by his wisdom, prudence and integrity, rose from being a slave in Nebuchadnezzar's household, to be one of the three presidents over the kingdom of Babylon. We think of this man alone in his integrity, assailed by the most formidable temptations: the one clean soul amid the pollutions of a godless city: the one straight and fearless man among its flattering courtiers: continuing as usual, regard-

less of the king's word and at the risk of his own life, to kneel three times a day at his open window with his face toward Jerusalem. We think of Nehemiah, the honoured cup-bearer of Artaxerxes, silently praying to the God of heaven, as he stood behind the royal chair in his office of chief attendant, praying for the restoration of Jerusalem and making request for the city of David, as he handed the wine into the king's hand. In the same way we think of a similar influence at the court and in the harem of Xerxes; and of a great deliverance of the poor captive Jews from their enemies in the land of their exile; a deliverance wrought this time not by a Moses or a Daniel but by the orphan slave girl, Esther, the Jewish maiden whom the Persian king had honoured by making her his queen. In the person of this Jewish heroine we see how natural gifts may be consecrated and blessed of God. How such endowments as wit and beauty, such things as accomplishments (acquisitions which often minister only to vanity or frivolity), may be made sacred, and may add to the happiness and well-being of society, by being offered on the altar of a pure mind to God Who gave them. But if this is the first and most obvious lesson there is a deeper lesson still which underlies it. Like so many Bible stories this story of Esther represents a conflict and a victory. A conflict between good and evil—the old conflict commencing in Eden

and fought out on the Cross. The conflict is represented with endless diversity in Holy Scripture, as it is in the scenes and circumstances of human life: so that the lesson applies to all sorts and conditions of men.

In this story we see goodness in a most depressing minority, and evil for a time triumphing. We see Haman, the hereditary foe of Esther's race, exerting his utmost power to destroy it. And we see Esther herself as the opponent of Haman, alone in her purity and honour, foiling through the help of God the Canaanite's power, and breaking the shafts of ungodliness. And we know that we ourselves are engaged in just such a conflict. Indeed it is one of the conditions of this life to provide this conflict for all who will enter into it. For in every sphere of human interest or human activity we find evil rearing its head like the serpent in Eden; the Haman of this world plotting against our souls to destroy them. And it is only honesty of purpose and faith in God that will enable us to contend fearlessly and earnestly.

Shall we not in the consideration of this Old Testament story, from the example of Esther's courage and victory, derive renewed confidence and a fresh incentive to perseverance and hope in the conflict of the saints?

XXI.

The Power of Goodness.

PROVERBS x. 7.
"The memory of the just is blessed."

TO-DAY[1] is one of universal mourning all over England, nor is the feeling confined to this country alone; but in our British possessions, and, indeed, in all parts of the civilised world, men are assembling to do what we are now doing. They are holding services of commemoration and of thanksgiving for that great and noble life which God, in His good Providence, gave to us more than eighty years ago, and associated with the fortunes of this country, and which for the welfare of our land and the spread of His gospel, He has preserved all these years in fruitfulness and blessing.

This great and noble life has at length passed from the theatre of this world and from the sphere of active service on earth, into the rest

[1] Day of funeral of Queen Victoria, February 2nd, 1901.

which God has prepared for the souls of the righteous, where in peace and safety they await the final manifestation of His love. For her, we cannot mourn, for Christ has taken His servant (who served Him all her days with a true and faithful service) to a well-earned rest, and to a still greater nearness to Himself. But in human sympathy we mourn, as all true-hearted subjects must mourn, the separation and loss entailed upon her family, and upon the people committed to her care.

A wonderful spectacle that must have been which a few hours ago marked in the streets of the Metropolis the homage and affection of the nation for the person of the departed Queen. Such preparation, such feeling has never before been shown at the death of any English sovereign. If the Jubilee of 1897 was an inspiring evidence of a people's gladness and a people's thankfulness, still more are these last farewells an evidence of a nation's sorrow, and a nation's tears. In the wave of universal grief which has swept over the country, you have a gauge of the power and influence of goodness in the world. For though the unique position of the Queen Empress, who ruled over more than one-fifth of the earth, was sufficient of itself to call forth a world-wide recognition, and though her own personal gifts of wisdom and discretion could not but have greatly added to this, yet

neither of these alone would have had any power to call forth the genuine feeling, the beautiful sorrow, the all but universal mourning which has been manifested in all parts of the Queen's dominions, during the past week, and which has culminated in the solemn services of to-day.

It was goodness which exerted this influence, which swayed the hearts of the people, and gave to Victoria that mighty power which she possessed over all classes, from peer and statesman to peasant and civilian. This influence was no doubt greatly extended by her exalted position, and by the extraordinary opportunities which that position opened out to her. By the circumstances of her life and reign it was directed into countless channels, which the influence of private individuals could never enter. Yet it was the same kind of influence which anyone may exert, only of a greater degree, and manifested on a wider scale. This is the point which for the past ten days the united voice of testimony has been urging. To this the fervid utterances of the greatest in Church and State have attached their common seal. It was goodness which made Victoria what she was, which enthroned her in the affections of her people, and made this woman-ruler the greatest of English Sovereigns since the days of Alfred. To this all agree.

Well! it is through this living and enduring power of goodness (which stretches out beyond

the years of our own narrow life, and hands on the blessing to other people and other times), that those words of the great Hebrew king are true: "The memory of the just is blessed."

Greatness alone may be attractive and may startle mankind by its force and originality. The genius of a Napoleon may leave its mark on the destinies of nations for some time after the life of its possessor has drawn to a close, but its force is at the best erratic and uncertain, and it is moreover a declining power, soon destined to wither and decay. Superlative wickedness, like that of Nero, has a terrible actuality at the time. It will blanch the cheek with fear, and the memory of its atrocities will dwell long in the recollections of mankind. But it has no power to alleviate a single hardship or to inspire a single reform, for it is the memory of goodness only that is blessed.

The reason for this is, that goodness does not stand alone. It is associated with the strength of God, in consequence of which it has a strange vitality. It does not end with the hymn sung at our interment. It has, in itself, a mysterious power of self-propagation and re-multiplication. It spreads to others by a sort of moral infection, and goes on in an ever lengthening chain of sympathy and service, long after the author of it has passed from our sight. That is why the Church includes in the Prayer Book certain occasional services in commemoration of the lives

and deaths of the apostles and others, whom we know to have been true saints of God. It is because, by rehearsing the story of their faith and virtue, and by dwelling upon their holy lives, we catch something of the inspiration which moved them, and, attracted by the beauty of their examples, are led to put our feelings of admiration into practice, and so are induced to copy and follow *them* as *they* followed Christ. If it were not for this principle of commemoration employed by the Church, the lives of even the apostles themselves would soon drop out of the public memory. But the Church will not let them be forgotten. She is continually reminding us of their good deeds. Thus she has taken up, and made a practical use of the truth enunciated by Solomon, that "the memory of the just is blessed," by setting before us the lives of the saints and by bidding us emulate their examples. In the same way one object of our commemoration to-day, is not only to emphasise the loss we have sustained in the death of our beloved Queen, and to express our own deep sorrow: not only to mark our sense of the greatness of her character and the splendour of her reign, but also to bury deep down in our memories the bright and noble example which she has left us to follow. Without this practical endeavour to let her faith, her courage, her simple devotion to duty, her ready sympathy, her unfailing cheerfulness, in other

words, her acknowledged goodness, stamp itself upon our hearts and lives, this commemoration would lose much of its value, and forfeit no little of the beauty of its intention.

We often remark how soon men are forgotten, indeed, it is one of the saddest thoughts in life, that even those who love us best will soon forget us. In confirmation of this, take any ancient churchyard such as our own. Who can tell the number of those who rest beneath the moss-covered stones which love erected in days gone by to preserve the memory of the dead? In many instances the name is gone, and the age and the date, while the simple memorial itself is rapidly perishing, and soon nought will be left but the green sward which discloses nothing of the past. Thus we are left in absolute ignorance concerning hundreds who lie in any ancient place of burial. We cannot tell who and what they were, or where they lived, or how they spent the life which God gave them. These facts have all faded from the tablets of human memory, as the names have perished from the rude stones which recorded them. So completely has all recollection of these persons vanished, that it is as though they had never been. Yet these very people, over whose silent graves you unconsciously tread, may, nevertheless, be exerting a real and effective influence upon their successors, upon the men and women who follow them. For, if they lived

good lives, those good lives would most certainly influence their children and others, and these in turn would influence their descendants; so that it may easily happen that someone who lived a hundred or more years ago, who now sleeps in a hidden and unremembered grave, whose very name and existence is forgotten, may at this moment be exerting a greater influence on the life of a family, or a village, than the living members of it. Such is the enduring influence of goodness.

Think of our ancient parish churches such as this in which we are now assembled. Who built them? Who gave the ground, and the stone, and the timber for their erection? Who planned and executed the work? Who did the carving which in old churches is often so careful in execution and detail (as excellent in finish as in design)? Four or five hundred years ago all this was known, but it is now, for the most part, unknown. The men who did these things have long since passed away, and their names are forgotten; but their works live on because they were good works, the fruit of faith, and hope, and charity. These remain, and we are profiting by the labours wrought by unknown benefactors, who lived, it may be, centuries ago, and are influenced by their examples Thus "the memory of the just is blessed."

But our commemoration to-day has another

purpose, besides that of awaking in us a desire to imitate the great example, which our good and gracious Queen has left for her people to follow. A purpose nearly allied to that for which a special service is provided in the Prayer Book for the 2nd February. I refer to the Presentation of our blessed Lord, Himself, in the Temple, when His Mother, on the fortieth day from His birth, brought the Infant Saviour, and dedicated, or presented Him to the Lord. The thought embodied in this act was, that the child belonged to God, that it was His before a mother's arms had fondled it. His, right through life, more truly His than it could be said even to be its father's or its mother's. This is what the rite was intended to express, and the same idea underlies our bringing the dead, before interment, into the church. It is an act of dedication or presentation, an act, too, of confession on our part, that the remains which we thus dedicate to Christ (the body, as well as the soul which has gone to God), are His, and are in His sacred keeping. We are painfully conscious of the change which takes place at death, of the dissolution of the material body, the disintegrating effects of Nature, and of our inability to keep what we so much prize, or to stay by one short hour the inevitable progress of decay. But despite this humbling fact of the body's return to its primitive dust, we know and believe that there are

elements which death cannot touch or destroy, that all which constitutes the identity of the body, all which is necessary to its human integrity, is safely guarded by the hand of God, and is kept and preserved by the power of Christ, until He comes again to claim it as His own, and to call it from the dust, as He called forth Lazarus from his sepulchre, to rise and meet Him in the air. And so we bring our dead, and carry them into the church as an act of dedication, even of that which is material and perishable. It is our offering and presentation of the body to the Lord, before we commit it to the ground and leave it in His safe and sacred keeping.

We are here then, first of all, to pray. To join with all the Churches in this country in an act of solemn dedication and prayer. We approach God as one people, and though scattered in different parts of the realm, we unite with those who are permitted to take part in the actual burial of our revered and beloved Sovereign. Thus the whole country is joining in that service. By approaching God in the same words, and in the same way, we are doing here exactly what we should do if we were standing beside her last resting-place. We are committing her to the Everlasting Arms of the All Father, and to the safe custody of His Almighty keeping.

We are here, in the second place, to join in a general act of national thanksgiving for God's gift

to this nation through Victoria's long and beneficent reign, and to bless Him for all that she has been to us. And we are here also to imprint on our hearts, and to pray that we may follow out in our lives, the great example which she has bequeathed to us and to this nation. While in her royal state and high position she stood alone, in her life and Christian character she stood beside us. As an example of holy womanhood, as the loving wife, the good mother, the true saint and faithful servant of God, she speaks, by the past eighty years, to every one of us. May her memory never fade from the hearts of her people, but be to us and to this country an abiding memorial of the truth of that saying, that "the memory of the just is blessed."

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